

BROWN
SUGAR

LADY (ARTHUR) LEVER

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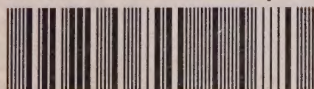


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BROWN SUGAR

ONE ACT PLAYS BY GERTRUDE JENNINGS.

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LADY (ARTHUR) LEVER.

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BROWN SUGAR

A Light Comedy in Three Acts

BY
LADY (ARTHUR) LEVER

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BROWN SUGAR

First produced under the management of Mr. Leon M. Lion at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on Wednesday, July 7, 1920, and transferred to the Garrick Theatre, October 1920, with the following cast of characters :—

THE EARL OF KNIGHTSBRIDGE	<i>Mr. Eric Lewis</i>
LORD SLOANE	} (His sons) { <i>Mr. Herbert Marshall</i>
THE HON. ARCHIBALD WENTWORTH	
THE COUNTESS OF KNIGHTSBRIDGE	<i>Miss Henrietta Watson</i>
LADY SLOANE (formerly Stella Deering, in the Chorus of "The Daffodil Girl")	<i>Miss Edna Best</i>
MRS. CUNNINGHAM	<i>Miss Gladys Harvey</i>
LADY HONORIA NESBITT	<i>Miss Margaret Halstan</i>
CROBIE CARRUTHERS	<i>Mr. Martyn Roland</i>
JOHNSON	<i>Mr. Matthew Forsyth</i>
SAUNDERS	<i>Mr. Denis McGill</i>
MR. EDMUNDSON (A Theatre Manager)	<i>Mr. Charles Kenyon</i>
SNELLING (His assistant)	<i>Mr. Seymour Beard</i>
MISS GIBSON (His typist)	<i>Miss Louise Hampton</i>

The play produced by

LEON M. LION,

who desires gratefully to acknowledge the valuable assistance
rendered to him by Mr. Y. E. Harold Terry.

ACT I

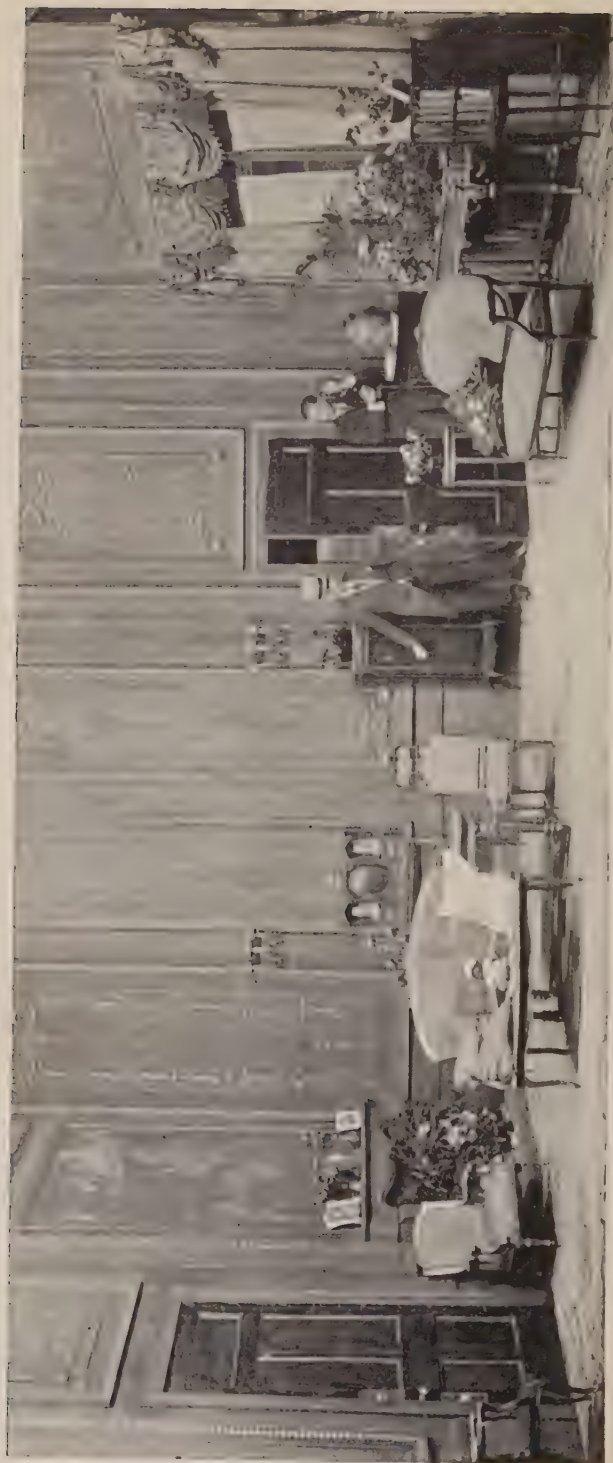
Private Room in Horridge's Hotel, Mayfair.

ACT II

Sitting Hall at Dewhurst

ACT III

Manager's Office at the London Palladrome.



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BROWN SUGAR

ACT I

SCENE.—*A comfortably furnished private sitting-room in a fashionable London hotel. The principal entrance is by a door L. of the back wall, which leads from the main corridor of the hotel. There is another door down R., which leads to the other rooms of the flat. Above this door is a fire-place, on the mantel of which are bowls of red roses and a photograph of LADY SLOANE. There is a profusion of roses in the room, whilst ferns and azaleas are arranged in the fire-place, and there is a jardinière before the large window L. It is a summer day, and the sun streams in creating an atmosphere of sultry heat. There is a settee before the window, and another settee is situated R.C., behind which is a large oblong table. On the back wall there are a writing bureau, a tantalus on a small table and a small cabinet. Below the window there is a revolving bookcase, and above it a low bookcase on which is placed a telephone and a directory.*

The rise of the curtain discloses an empty stage. The telephone bell is ringing. JOHNSON, a tall, imposing-looking manservant, enters R. and crosses to telephone U.L.

JOHNSON (*speaking at the telephone*). Hallo—yes? Hotel Bureau—yes—who?—(*with a surprised air*) Lord Knightsbridge?—to see Lord Sloane?—But his Lordship's out, and so's her Ladyship—you've sent him up?—without finding out first if his Lordship was in, or if he wanted to see him? You'll get into trouble, miss, if you do things like that. What d'you think you're there for?—

(*Enter LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. He is an aristocratic old gentleman, who endeavours to cover his natural Victorian Toryism with the mantle of post-war democracy. He is, however, kept in careful check by his wife, with the result that he is only permitted to show his true character during her absence. When she is present, he is like an effervescent liquid contained in a sealed bottle. But when the cork is loosened it comes forth with a report, for he is addicted to periodic bursts of approval or disapproval, whenever stress of circumstances appears to demand his intervention. He loves a joke,*

and has a fine sense of humour, which he employs, whenever he dare, at his wife's expense. When he enters, he is in a state of suppressed excitement.

JOHNSON. Good afternoon, my lord.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming down slightly*). Afternoon, Johnson. Lord and Lady Sloane at home?

JOHNSON. They're both out at the moment, my lord, (*takes hat*) but I'm expecting them back shortly. (*Moves up to bookcase U.L., and puts hat on it.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*taking off gloves*). Oh, that's a pity. Lady Knightsbridge will be here in a few moments, and er—(*humorously confidential*) to tell you the truth, Johnson, I came on ahead in the hope of getting a private view—heh?

(JOHNSON *returns to him.*)

JOHNSON (*smiling discreetly*). Yes, my lord.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Tell me, what's she like? Does she—er——? Can she—er——? Is she—er——?

JOHNSON (*gravely*). A very charming young lady, my lord.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*much relieved*). Ah! Good, good! Naturally, one felt a little—er—well—er——

JOHNSON. Naturally, my lord.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. They're happy, eh? That's the main thing.

JOHNSON. Extremely happy, my lord. There's no doubt that it's a love-match—on *both* sides.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah! It's refreshing to hear that—very refreshing in—— (*Giving JOHNSON gloves.*)

JOHNSON. Of course, my lord, if I may say so, Her Ladyship is a bit strange to our ways at present, but—er——

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You think she'll get accustomed to 'em, eh?

JOHNSON. I've no doubt of it, my lord.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Capital! Capital! . . . Got a photograph of her anywhere about?

JOHNSON (*pointing to the silver-framed portrait on the mantelpiece*). That's the most recent portrait of Her Ladyship, and in my opinion, my lord, a speaking likeness. (*Goes up to bookcase U.L. with gloves.*)

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *crosses to mantelpiece behind table, screws his monocle into his eye, and takes and surveys the portrait with evident delight. He brings it down below settee R.C.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Charming. Delightful. (*Reminiscently.*) Yes—yes—yes. Let me see, I saw her in the—er——

JOHNSON (*returning to his side*). "The Daffodil Girl."

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah, yes, "The Daffodil Girl." (*Recites.*)

"The Daffodil Girl, the Daffodil Girl,
She's stolen my heart, and my head's in a whirl,
At the Flower Show at Chelsea.
It's easy to tell she's
The pick of the bunch
Is the Daffodil——" Ahem!

(*Catches JOHNSON'S eye.*) H'm, yes! Quite so, quite so! She was in the chorus, I think?

JOHNSON. Second row, my lord.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah!—second row, yes, in the corner. Egad, I'll take her in hand myself. (*Replaces photo on mantel.*)

(*Telephone bell rings again.*)

JOHNSON. Excuse me, my lord. (*He answers the 'phone.*) Hallo! Yes?—thank you. (*He replaces receiver.*) Lady Knightsbridge is at the lift, my lord. Would you wish me to meet her?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming behind table to R. of door*). Yes, yes, do. And—er—Johnson, you might tell her that I've only just arrived.

JOHNSON (*gravely*). Quite so, my lord.

(*JOHNSON goes out, back L.*)

(*LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE comes C. and surveys the room. He sees on the settee R.C. a woollen mascot, which he takes up, humming meanwhile the refrain of "The Daffodil Girl." He sits down on settee R.C., but hurriedly puts the mascot by his side as JOHNSON announces LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, back L.*)

JOHNSON. Lady Knightsbridge.

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE extinguishes a warm heart by frigid formality. She is a generation behind her time, and believes that, in marrying into the historic house of Knightsbridge, she has taken upon herself a great responsibility, a responsibility which had been made still greater by the, to her, unbecoming attitude that her husband is often wont to take up. The news has been a great shock to her. She has come to visit the new daughter-in-law with a sad feeling in her heart. What will she be like? How will she behave? Lady Knightsbridge's knowledge of the strata of society other than her own is of the vaguest, but she feels that the girl must be different, and she dreads this meeting. It is, then, with a heavy heart, but a determination to make the best of things, if such a course be possible, that she enters the Sloanes' sitting-room on this particular afternoon.*)

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE surveys room.*)

Will Your Ladyship have some tea whilst you're waiting for His Lordship to return?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. No, thank you.

JOHNSON. Is there anything that I can get for you, my lord?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*who has risen on* LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE'S *entrance and moved R.*). No, thanks. (*Comes up to R. of table.*) I see there are some cigarettes on the table there. I'll help myself if I want one.

(JOHNSON *goes out back L.* LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *regards her husband suspiciously.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (L.C.). What was your idea in getting here before me, Edward?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (R.C.). Eh? Oh, none at all, my dear. I happened to arrive a little early, and thought I might as well come up as wait for you in the lounge. We might have missed one another there.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I am not easily missed. (*Moves slightly towards settee R.C.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*sadly*). No, I suppose I should have remembered that, my dear. (*Sits on settee.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. It's very tiresome of Sloane to be out. (*Crosses from settee L.C.*) He might have remembered that Thursday is always my day for paying calls.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Yes, yes. Very trying, this waiting—very trying.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*pettishly*). No more trying than any other time since we have known of this unspeakable marriage. (C., *moves to chair L. of table.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*smiling at his own humour*). Unspeakable! H'm! Hardly so far as you're concerned, my dear.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*turning, by no means amused*). Is that intended to be funny? Personally, I fail to see the humour of it. Seeing that he is your son, I can quite understand that you see nothing astonishing in Sloane having been entangled with a chorus girl, but I *should* have expected you to resent the fact that he has committed the unpardonable solecism of making her his wife, or, at any rate, to have shown more respect for my feelings than to make a *jest of it*. (*Sits chair L. of table.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*rising, moves towards her*). Now, come, come, Emily! What's the good of riding your high horse? The thing's done, and can't be undone. (*Crosses to the mantelpiece and gets the photo of STELLA, which he brings over and shows to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) It's a bit of a pill to swallow, I'll admit, but we've got to swallow it, and there's nothing to be gained by pulling a long face over it. Besides, you must remember that there are chorus girls and—er—Daffodil girls, and—dash it all—Sloane *has* got taste. (*Shows the photograph to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, who glances at it and returns it to him.* LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *returns to the fire-place.*)

I'm sanguine about the affair, I am really. (*Replaces photo on mantel.*)

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE shrugs her shoulders sceptically. The entrance of LORD SLOANE prevents her from expressing her lack of faith more eloquently.*)

(*Enter LORD SLOANE back L. LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE rises.*)

LORD SLOANE is a young man of about twenty-seven years of age, tall, good-looking, and, above all, supremely happy looking. As soon as we see him we feel that JOHNSON'S remark, "It is a love-match on both sides" is correct without a doubt as far as the husband is concerned. He is so quiet and reserved that to the stranger he appears cold and unfeeling. This, however, is quite a mistaken idea, as all his intimate friends know full well. Often the very depth of emotion tongue-ties him and leaves him speechless, and on such occasions only a clenching of the hands and a determined look in the eyes reveals anything of his innermost thoughts.

He greets his parents eagerly, but not without some apprehension as to the reception he will receive from his mother.

SLOANE. Ah, mother, how are you? (*To C., LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE rises, and he kisses her cheek.*) Sorry to be out when you arrived, but, of course, I'd no idea that you were coming. . . . (*Turning to his father.*) How are you, sir?

(*SLOANE crosses over R. and shakes hands.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Capital, my boy, thanks—capital. No need to ask how you are. We—er—we've come to make the acquaintance of your bride.

SLOANE (*quietly, below table*). That's kind of you. (*Crosses L.*) Of course, it's no use pretending that I—I don't know you're disappointed.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*with genuine emotion, L. of table*). Oh, Sloane, Sloane, how could you have done it?

SLOANE (*puts her back in chair L. of table*). Let's understand one another straight away, mother. I wouldn't have it undone for all the money in the world. I'm happier than I ever dreamed it possible to be. (*Appealingly.*) You're—you're going to be kind to Stella?

(*He derives no encouragement from his mother's expression or from her silence. His face falls, and LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE endeavours to restore his confidence.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*R.*). Why, of course we are, my boy, of course we are. That's what we're here for. . . . Ah!

(*The door back L. is flung open impetuously, and STELLA bursts into the room, laden with parcels. That she is very young, indeed, little more than a schoolgirl, is the first thought that strikes LORD*

and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE on her entrance. She is petite and charming, and possessing an entire lack of self-consciousness is always thoroughly downright in whatever she says, a quality that is going to cause her much trouble in the future. Her past shows itself, not in any commonness that is usually associated with the chorus, nor in any real lack of refinement, but in an entire lack of that artificial polish which, unpleasant though it may be, has been found necessary in our modern society. What she thinks she says: a practice that may prove as unfortunate as it sounds admirable. It is not so much the fact that she is out of place in her new environment but her entire inability to realize that and to make any sustained attempt to adapt herself to her new position. She tries frequently, but cannot for long play her part, and in times of difficulty and of trouble always becomes again the child of Nature.

Her eyes are all for her husband, with the result that she does not immediately on her entrance perceive his parents. SLOANE moves up stage when the door opens.)

STELLA. Ah, there you are, Toddles darling. Such a rag! (Throws parcel on settee.) I—— (She catches sight of LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, who has risen to greet her, and immediately becomes tongue-tied.) Oh!

SLOANE. This is my wife, mother.

(He leads her up to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.)

STELLA (crossing to her, and putting out her hand nervously). H—how d’you do?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (regarding her intently, as she shakes hands). How d’you do?

(STELLA turns and sees LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE down R. looking at her benevolently. His kindly expression dispels her nervousness at any rate so far as he is concerned. She crosses over and shakes hands with him.)

STELLA (crosses to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, R). And you’re my father-in-law. You must be. Your nose is just like Toddles’.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE crosses to settee.)

(Laughing mischievously.) How are you—papa?

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE elevates her eyebrows and sighs fastidiously, but LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE evidently is far from being displeased.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Very well, my dear, thank you, and very pleased to make your acquaintance.

STELLA. Are you really? . . . Anyhow, it’s nice of you to say so.

(She looks from one to the other.)

You must have thought some big thoughts about me. (*Crossing to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) I don't blame you. It's no wonder, if you're a bit fed up—

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE shivers.*)

about what's happened. (*Takes SLOANE's hand.*) You expected Toddles to do better than me, now didn't you?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*L., low-voiced*). We had hoped that our son would select a wife from—er——

STELLA. At any rate, the *front* row of the chorus, eh? . . . But don't you worry. Toddles and I'll rub along all right.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. *Must* you call him that dreadful name?

STELLA. Toddles! Don't you like it? I christened him that—ages ago. I think it's an awfully good nickname. Haven't you noticed how tongue-tied he becomes when anything jags him real hard—shuts up like an oyster. (*Turning to her husband.*) Don't you, old thing?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I must confess that I dislike nicknames at any time, but when they have their origin in personal—er—idiosyncrasies—I—er—— (*Sits settee L.*)

STELLA (*with an air of finality*). Think they're a bit off, eh? (*Moves above settee.*) Right-o! What'd you like me to call him? (*One knee on settee above LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Personally, I always call him Sloane.

STELLA. That sounds to me just as much like a nickname.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*exceedingly surprised*). Why?

STELLA. Well, as if you called him Sloane, because he's always "On the square."

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE is not amused, but LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE and SLOANE make up for her lack of appreciation.*)

STELLA. That really suits him better than Toddles, because it's what he is. (*Back to LORD SLOANE.*)

SLOANE (*well-pleased, but protesting*). Oh, I say old thing! Spare my blushes. (*Moves over U.L.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*moving C., well-pleased and not ashamed of it*). Never you mind him, my dear. You stick to the truth!

(*SLOANE is behind settee L., and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE is L. STELLA beams upon LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, and then turns again to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

STELLA (*to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). Right-o, I'll try to do as you ask, but I won't promise. Nicknames are—er—well, a bit like stamps, they stick—— (*Looking at LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) Don't they?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*R.C., greatly amused*). Ha! Ha! Bravo! Very good! I must remember that. Stamps—stick——(*Chuckles.*)

STELLA (*crosses to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). I see that papa and I are going to be pals—what, what, what? (*She slaps LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE on the shoulder, and then moves c., and addresses them eagerly.*) Oh, Toddles—Sloane, I mean—before I forget. I had lunch with Ninon de Vaux, Bud Martin and Beryl Bouncer, and I've promised them faithfully that I'll take you to the Palladium supper and dance next week. They're going to have it on the stage after the show. It'd be an awful rag if papa'd come too. (*She turns excitedly to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) Will you? (c.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*pleased, but doubtful*). A stage supper and dance! Most attractive! I—er—I—er—

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I'm afraid that it will be quite impossible for Lord Knightsbridge to attend. He has—er—a previous engagement that evening. (*On settee L.*)

STELLA (*turns to her blankly*). But I didn't say what evening it was.

(*A moment's awkward silence.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*crosses slightly to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). Well—er—what evening is it, my dear?

STELLA. Next Tuesday.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Tuesday—well I—— (*Catches LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE'S eye. In tone of great regret.*) Ah, then, as your mother-in-law says, I'm afraid it'll be quite impossible for me. (*He appeals to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) We're having some people in to dine that evening, aren't we, my dear?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. We shall be back at Dewhurst.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Oh, yes, of course. I forgot. (*To STELLA.*) I'm very sorry, my dear. I should love to have come otherwise.

STELLA (*crossing to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). I say, you're not cross because I didn't ask you to come too, are you? Of course, we'd love to have you, only, somehow, I didn't think it'd appeal to you.

(*LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE and SLOANE exchange glances, and the former turns and moves slightly R. to hide a laugh.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. That, Stella, does credit to your discrimination.

(*STELLA is hurt, although she does not quite understand why, and turns aside. SLOANE lays a hand upon his mother's shoulder.*)

SLOANE (*with quiet reproach*). Mother! (*To STELLA.*) Well, what about some tea, dear?

STELLA. Oh, I'm so sorry. I forgot all about it. (*Throws hat to SLOANE.*) Catch! (*He does so.*) I'll ring at once.

(*She crosses above table to the bell-push with the intention of doing so, whilst SLOANE puts her hat on bookcase L.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Not for me, thank you. I had tea before I came.

STELLA (*above table to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). What about you? Won't you have a cup? . . . Oh, no! *You won't!* A whisky-and-soda's more in your line, I bet. (*Coming c.*) Get papa a drink, Tod—Sloane. . . . Oh, lord, now I've made a jockey of him. (*Turning to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, with a gesture of hopelessness.*) I'll never get out of it.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *winces at STELLA's free and easy manners.*

STELLA *observes her, and sees that somehow she has done wrong. She pauses, puzzled, for a moment.*)

SLOANE (*crossing to tantalus on table, U.C.*). Will you have a drink, father?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. No, thanks, my boy, though it was kind of Stella to suggest it.

(STELLA *recovers her self-possession and spirits.*)

STELLA. Have a cigarette, then.

(*Taking the box from the table she offers it to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, but just as he is about to take a cigarette she snatches it away and offers it to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

STELLA. Beg pardon! They're only gaspers. (*To LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

(SLOANE *takes cigarette from tantalus stand, lights it.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. No, thank you, I don't—er—er——

STELLA. Oh, don't you? *I* do.

(STELLA *then offers them again to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, but he refuses. She takes one herself and sits on table L. Her father-in-law strikes a match for her, but she prefers to light her cigarette by her husband's, and so saucily blows out the match which LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE holds up for her. She sits on table R.C.*)

STELLA. Not likely! (*Changing the subject, to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) Did you see me in the "Daffodil Girl?"

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. H'm! Ah! I—I—must have done. (*Sits on chair R.*)

STELLA. I was getting on fine. Old Gribble was going to let me have Lettie Fairburn's part on tour. I was doing her dance for a lark in the wings one night—you know—the one in the second act; this one——

(*She jumps off the table and proceeds to show a few steps of her dance, and to do it remarkably well. LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE is delighted, and watches eagerly, whilst SLOANE looks on proudly, but in some fear of his mother. LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE rises, and crossing behind*

makes ineffectual attempts to stop her. STELLA at length stops, laughing.)

And the old boy saw me, and said I did it better than Lettie—and——

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I'm sure you did, my dear, but do go on. *(STELLA continues dance, and on a high kick nearly kicks LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, who has come R. of her.)*

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(C., horrified at the display she has just witnessed)*. Now that you are my son's wife—er—Stella, I hope you will do your best to forget your stage life and it's—er—unfortunate surroundings.

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE has moved up R. slightly at the end of the dance.)

STELLA *(not quite understanding)*. Why? I'm not ashamed of it.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. At present, no—but you will live and learn.

STELLA *(hotly)*. If I'm ever such a little beast as to forget kind hearts and good friends, call me a rotten tomato!

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE crosses to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, and STELLA crosses L.)

Toddles isn't ashamed of my past life. You love to see me dance, don't you, old man? *(Moves up to him.)*

SLOANE. You know I do, dear.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(comes down L. of LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE)*. Of course he does, and so do I, and so does your mother-in-law, really—only she's too much of the last generation to admit it. *(Taking LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE's hand and patting it.)*

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(looking daggers at her husband)*. As your—your father-in-law is very well aware, I was not referring to your dancing, Stella. You do it very—very gracefully. *(Moving C.)*

STELLA. Oh, thank you.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Also please don't think I would have you ungrateful of past kindnesses. Very much the contrary. But you have stepped from one world into another. Obviously you graced the world that you've left—I should like you to do the same in the world that you're just entering.

STELLA. Be a lady, you mean? Ho! That's as easy as winking. *(She mimics the mincing steps of the fashionable lady, moving down L.)* I'm a quick study—very quick—and as long as you don't want to change me *inside*, I'll be as slick on to the fancy manner stunt as a trick monkey. Don't you worry! *(Returning to table.)*

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE sighs and sits on the settee R., almost on the mascot.)

(The telephone bell rings.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(as she sits)*. Oh!

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE hastily rises, alarmed.)

(Chuckles). Oh! *(He picks up mascot and hands it to STELLA.)*

(SLOANE has moved up to the telephone.)

STELLA. Maggie—Maggie, the mascot. *(She crosses L., and puts the mascot on the settee L., and moves up C.)*

SLOANE. Hallo! . . . Yes. Lord Sloane speaking. . . . Who? . . . Oh! Hold the line a minute, will you? *(Putting his hand over the mouthpiece of the receiver and addressing the company generally.)* Honoria's called; shall I tell them to send her up?

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves up by fire-place.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Of course.

STELLA. Who's Honoria?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. My niece, Lady Honoria Nesbitt. She wishes to meet you, so I suggested she should call this afternoon. *(Sits on settee R.)*

STELLA *(reflectively)*. That's the girl that wanted to marry Toddles, isn't it? *(Coming to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.)*

(Noting LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE's look of annoyance, she corrects herself hastily.)

I mean that you wanted Toddles to marry.

SLOANE *(hastily, into the telephone)*. Ask the lady to come up, please.

(He replaces the receiver and drops down C.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. My dear Stella, even if your supposition were correct, you should have known better than to say it to me. One of the first things you've got to learn is that discretion is the better part of breeding.

STELLA. Have I said something wrong again? Oh, please, forgive me. I know I'm awfully tactless. But I won't let Lady Honoria see that I know. *(Crosses to SLOANE.)* I've got Toddles, *(Takes his hand)* and she hasn't, and that's all that matters. Poor thing!—she can't be very clever if she couldn't catch you. I should have thought any designing female could have done that! *(Playing with his lapels, and patting his cheek affectionately.)*

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(unable to resist such an opportunity)*. Perhaps it's because my niece was not a designing female that she failed.

(STELLA is up in arms at once.)

STELLA *(crossing to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE)*. What d'you mean

by that? Are you suggesting that I trapped my husband into marrying me?

(SLOANE has followed her down, and now makes movement to restrain her.)

SLOANE. Stella!

STELLA. No, Toddlers, your mother had better know the truth. (She addresses herself to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.) You may be surprised to hear that I refused your son three times, not because I didn't love him—I did—(With a loving glance at him)—I do—but because—I knew I wasn't of the same make that he is.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (from up behind table). My dear!—my dear!

STELLA (to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE). He said he was lonely—miserable, and that only I could make him happy—and so I married him. We were perfectly happy until—until now. (Her voice breaks, and she crosses down L.)

(SLOANE follows; puts his arm round her.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. And you are going to continue to be happy, my dear. (Moves down below fire-place.)

(STELLA bites her lip and says nothing.)

(Enter JOHNSON back L. and announces LADY HONORIA NESBITT.)

(LADY HONORIA is quite young, perhaps six or seven years Stella's senior, and of the wilting lily type. She is tall and thin, and her clothes, which hang in straight graceful folds, seem to accentuate her slimness. She is rather pale, with large almost sad-looking eyes, and very red lips. She speaks with a slight drawl, and her whole manner displays a mixture of cool insolence and bored indifference.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves down to the fire-place.)

HONORIA. Good afternoon, everybody. Ah! Sloane, how nice to see you again. (She gives him her left hand lazily, but holds his longer than is necessary. Crosses R.) Was it you, uncle, that I heard assuring some one that they were going to be happy? Taking rather a responsibility, wasn't it?

SLOANE (crossing). Let me introduce my wife to you, Honoria.

(STELLA advances, hand outstretched.)

HONORIA (coming back R.C.—as if she only just remembered that STELLA existed). Ah! Yes. How do you do? (Glances at her through eyeglasses.) The last time I saw you was at the Palladrome. As soon as I heard that Sloane had—er—had interests in that direction, I paid a special visit to inspect you. (Coming C.—inspecting her.)

STELLA. And I suppose you never saw me.

HONORIA (*C. and L. of table, taking off gloves*). Oh yes, I did—at last. But it took me quite a time. I couldn't find anyone to tell me which girl you were. I asked the pew opener—

(Amused glance between STELLA and SLOANE.)

—and the refreshment girl to point out Stella Deering to me, and they all looked as blank as stone walls, and said they didn't know the ladies of the chorus by name. But just when I was despairing of ever spotting you, I caught sight of Sloane in his corner stall.

(STELLA gives SLOANE a fond look, and LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE chuckles.)

I looked where he was looking, and then I saw you. You *were* rather hidden away at the back, weren't you?

STELLA. I was rather far back, certainly, *(Crosses to her)* but Hicks was going to move me up.

HONORIA. And then you moved up without his help—how clever of you. . . . Well, Sloane, are you pleased to see me again? *(Turning abruptly to SLOANE, she crosses L.)*

SLOANE *(as shortly and as obviously untruthfully as courtesy will permit)*. Of course I am.

(He turns aside.)

HONORIA *(sentimentally to STELLA)*. Your husband and I were great friends in the old days—weren't we, Sloane?

SLOANE *(as before)*. Yes—rather.

HONORIA. Heigho! Happy days! *(She returns to chair L. of table.)*

STELLA *(smiling mischievously across to SLOANE)*. Yes—Toddles has told me.

HONORIA. Oh! So you've started married life on the principle of having no secrets from one another. How delightful of you. I wonder if Sloane has confessed to *all* his past—

SLOANE. Honoria!

HONORIA.—and *(Slowly and emphatically)* I wonder if you have. *(Sits.)*

STELLA *(crossing to HONORIA)*. Never mind about me! You must be a jolly sight more anxious about him.

(HONORIA elevates her eyebrows, and laughs easily. There is a short pause.)

HONORIA *(glancing insolently at her)*. You strange person. What a curious remark.

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE hums a few bars of "The Daffodil Girl," and moves up back of table.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Sloane, next week your father and I are expecting you—and your wife—to pay us a long visit at Dewhurst. We hope that you will make your home with us for some time.

(STELLA has moved up C. to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, and unobserved by the others she pulls a long face.)

SLOANE. Thanks very much, mother. We shall be delighted. (He turns to STELLA.) Shan't we, dear?

STELLA. Oh, rather, of course. Only don't forget that you've promised to take me to Paris for Christmas. (She turns to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE and addresses him confidentially.) After that we're going on to Monte. We haven't had a proper honeymoon yet, so we're going to have a real old bust! (She bangs him on the chest.)

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE rises, crosses down R., and she and HONORIA exchange glances.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah! What it is to be young and full of energy! I envy you, my dear. But in the meantime, you must come down to Dewhurst for a bit, and cheer us all up.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Sloane has already said that he will come. (She turns to her son.) We shall expect you on Tuesday.

SLOANE (turning to his wife). Will that suit you, Stella?

STELLA (coming down to SLOANE). Yes, I think so. . . . No! (To LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE). Hold on a minute. (Coming to her.) Tuesday's the Palladrome dance. We must make it Wednesday.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (tight-lipped). Our arrangements are all made for Tuesday. It will be very inconvenient if we have to alter them. However, if this dance is of so much more importance——

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE and SLOANE exchange glances.)

SLOANE. Well, mother, Stella appears to have promised——

STELLA (to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE). Yes, you see, Ninon's such an old pal, and Bud Martin——

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You must suit yourselves, of course. Only I must confess I'm disappointed. (She moves up by fire-place.)

HONORIA. I suppose we must be thankful if we see you any time now, Sloane. If you don't come down till Wednesday you'll miss the first day's cubbing, and it'll be the first time since I can remember that you and I have not been to it together.

STELLA (R.C., turning). Oh, so you're going to be at Dewhurst too, are you?

HONORIA. The prospect doesn't seem to please you.

STELLA (crossing L. to SLOANE). Oh, I don't care.

HONORIA. How charmingly you put it. (Rises.)

SLOANE (L.). I say, Honoria, if you're not riding "Sunlight" this season, you might lend her to Stella. She's done a bit of riding,

but not much, and "Sunlight's" just the very mare for her. She's quiet, and knows her work.

HONORIA. I should have been charmed, of course, only unfortunately, I *am* riding her. (*Crosses R.*)

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE brings the photo down and shows it to HONORIA, and then returns it to the mantel during the following few lines.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*fussily coming forward to STELLA*). No need for you to worry about a mount for Stella, Sloane. There are several in the stables that she can choose from. Indeed, I shall make it my business to pick one out for her myself.

STELLA (*L.C., excitedly*). To be my very own?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*C.*). Of course.

STELLA. Oh, you old dear! How divi of you. (*Twists him round.*) Wait till you see me riding astride.

(*She raises her skirt sufficiently to disclose the greater part of a very well-shaped leg.*)

STELLA. How's that for a good leg for a boot, eh?

(*LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE fixes his monocle and inspects the leg with interest; LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE is scandalized; HONORIA contemptuously amused, and SLOANE uncomfortable.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Charming, my dear—quite charming!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Really, Stella, really

HONORIA (*R.*). You forget, Aunt Emily, that Stella is accustomed to exhibiting her legs.

(*LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves up C.*)

STELLA (*crossing to HONORIA, and letting fly*). That's a catty remark, if you like! Is there anything disgraceful in having a decent pair of legs? I'll back mine against yours any day. (*Returns to L. of table.*) Come on, let's compare 'em!—and papa shall referee. (*She puts her leg up on the chair.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Oh, this is intolerable!

HONORIA (*crossing to L.*). How delightfully quaint! Molly, the Marchioness, in real life!

STELLA (*moving down*). All right, *Matchsticks*!

(*SLOANE is moved to protest. He lays a restraining hand on his wife's arm.*)

SLOANE. Stella!—dear!

STELLA (*L.C.*). You keep out of this, Toddles. (*She shakes his hand off, and he joins his father.*) It's just as well Lady Honoria and I should understand each other. (*To HONORIA.*) From the moment you entered this room—*my* room—you've insulted me.

Oh! don't think, because I'm common, that I don't understand your drawling—aristocratic—insolence. You wanted to prejudice Lady Knightsbridge against me.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *moves up R.*)

Well, don't worry, that's done—she thinks I'm just about the limit! You also wanted to show how intimate you were with Toddles. Well, I see that, too, but let me tell you that Toddles is *my* husband, and he's going to remain so. (*Crosses half-way to SLOANE.*)

HONORIA. My dear Sloane, really! I appeal to you.

SLOANE. But, Honoria, you——

(SLOANE *wants to speak, but becomes, as always, inarticulate from very depth of feeling.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming back to arm-chair R.*) What is the good of appealing to Sloane, Honoria. He must be as ashamed as I am. (*Sits.*)

SLOANE. Mother!

STELLA (*runs across to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE and stands before her in abject remorse.*) I'm sorry—oh! What can I say? I'm sorry—I didn't mean to vex you, I lost my temper. She's more than flesh and blood can stand.

(HONORIA *moves forward slightly to C.* SLOANE *has moved back to settee L.*)

Don't be angry with me, please don't be angry. (*Turning to LADY HONORIA.*) Oh! for goodness' sake go! (*Moves away.*)

HONORIA (*moving C.*) How perfectly delightful. This is the most amusing afternoon I've spent for ages. I've *heard* of people being turned out of a house, but I never thought I should *experience* it! (*Turns R. of door.*) Good-bye, Aunt Emily—see you on Tuesday. . . . Good-bye, Uncle. . . . So long, Sloane. I suppose I shall be accused of being sarcastic if I wish you happiness. (*She takes in SLOANE in a glance.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Sloane! Are you going to permit this?

SLOANE. Well, really, I——

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming to HONORIA he takes her hand, and brings her down a few steps.*) No! Come, come, Honoria, you girls mustn't part like this. (*He holds out his hand to STELLA.*) Stella—my dear!

STELLA (*coming forward and putting out hand, as always amenable to a kind word.*) Of course, I've been a beast. Please don't go, Lady Honoria. I'm sorry.

HONORIA (*airily.*) Oh, please don't apologize. I'm grateful to you for having afforded me a new experience. . . . (*She offers her*

hand high in the air in an exaggerated manner. STELLA reaches up and touches her fingers.) Good-bye, my dear cousin-in-law.

(SLOANE goes up to open door.)

If I may be permitted to offer a little advice, mount guard upon yourself, rather than on your husband. Good-bye, everybody. (Goes up to door back.)

SLOANE. I'll see you to the lift.

HONORIA (*maliciously, with a glance at STELLA*). But may you?

SLOANE. Please come, Honoria.

(*Exeunt, she laughing affectedly. A strained little silence ensues.*)

STELLA crosses L. to settee, and stands dejectedly, not attempting to entertain her guests. LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE is the first to break the silence by clearing his throat before he addresses STELLA.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*crosses to STELLA*). H'm! Ha! You mustn't take Honoria quite so seriously, my dear. She doesn't mean to be unkind in what she says. It's just her way. When you get to know her better you'll see that I'm right. You'll come to understand her.

STELLA. Oh, I understand her well enough. (*Crosses C. to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) I suppose you despise me?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I'd rather not say any more about it. (*Sits R. end of settee R.C.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Come, cheer up, my dear child. Where are all your pretty smiles?

STELLA (*C.*). Do I look a fright? Oh, I'm sure I do! (*She quickly takes a powder puff from her stocking and dabs her nose with it.*) There—is that better?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Much better, my dear. Quite charming.

(STELLA dabs LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE's nose with the puff.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Stella!

STELLA (*turning quickly*). Yes?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I have something to say to you.

STELLA (*running across eagerly*). Then you've forgiven me?

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE sits on settee L.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You are coming down to stay with us at Dewhurst, are you not?

STELLA. Oh, yes. (*Sits beside LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Then I feel sure you will be glad to have some one with you, to put you into the way, and prevent you—making any little mistakes—or—er—errors of tastes such as you displayed this afternoon.

STELLA. I—I'm sorry.

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *sitting on settee L. coughs nervously.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. What I mean is this—realizing that you would not be accustomed to the ways of people with whom you haven't mixed, Lord Knightsbridge and I came to the conclusion that—putting ourselves entirely aside—it would be only fair to you to afford you that instruction that is so necessary; and, therefore, I have engaged—I have arranged with a lady——

STELLA. You've arranged with a lady? To do what?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. To—er—be a companion to you—to put you into the way of things.

STELLA. You've engaged a bear-leader for me?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. That is hardly the term I should have chosen. She is a Mrs. Cunningham—one of the Hampshire Cunninghams. You will find her a charming woman. A widow, unfortunately, owing to the war, and she has been left badly off. She will, I hope, very soon put you in the way——

(STELLA, *who, during this last speech, has become more and more restive, can stand this no longer.*)

STELLA (*rising and bursting out*). Damn it all! This is the limit. (*She stamps down C. and then up.*)

(LORD and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *both start as if shot.*)

(LORD SLOANE *enters door back, and looks startled to see his wife stamping up and down the room with flushed cheeks and blazing eyes.*)

STELLA (*continuing up stage*). I won't submit to it—I won't!—I won't!—I won't! (*Turns.*) How dare you do such a thing? Your mother has engaged a female to watch me night and day, see that I don't pocket the silver or eat peas with a knife. I won't stand it! I swear I won't. (*Down L.C. to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

SLOANE (C.). What on earth are you talking about, darling?

STELLA. Can't you hear what I say? Your mother has had the cheek to engage a keeper for me.

SLOANE (*goes to top of settee R.C.*). Mother! What does this mean?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Your wife has told you—in her own delightful way.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*pacifying STELLA*). It's like this, Sloane. Your mother thought——

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. And you, also, Edward——

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Hum—ha—I should have added that. Your mother and I both thought that—er—that—er—our dear Stella might like to have a companion for a short time.

STELLA (*she stamps, and he retreats down L. away from her*). I

bet you never thought of such a thing. Why pretend that you had anything to do with it?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*to STELLA*). Of course, if you would rather not, my dear——

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*R., firmly*). I have *engaged* Mrs. Cunningham, Edward; I have asked her to call here this afternoon.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. But, still, Emily——

SLOANE (*moves down a trifle*). For what have you engaged Mrs. Cunningham?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. To teach your wife manners and self-control, Sloane.

(*STELLA moves R.C. SLOANE stops her.*)

SLOANE. Please remember, mother, that you are Stella's guest.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I appeal to your common sense. You wish your wife to be accepted by our friends, I suppose?

SLOANE (*looking lovingly at STELLA*). Of course.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Then mustn't she be taught our ways? She doesn't even speak the same language at present.

SLOANE. It is entirely for Stella to decide.

STELLA. Decide! (*Turning fiercely to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) I suppose you want me to be like Lady Honoria—that painted mass of airs and affectation. Let me tell you that I wouldn't be like that chalk-stick for anything you care to offer me.

(*STELLA crosses to the window L., and SLOANE half follows her.*)

(*During this speech JOHNSON announces Mrs. Cunningham, door back L. She is a middle-aged woman of calm demeanour and sympathetic manner. She is slightly worn, and shows signs of past trouble, but she is smartly if simply dressed. Her speech is quiet and slow. She has overheard the latter part of Stella's tirade, but tactfully appears to see nothing unusual in her behaviour.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Ah, how do you do, Lady Knightsbridge? I hope I am not late. (*To LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) How do you do? (*She shakes hands with LORD and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You are not at all late. You know my son? (*They bow.*) Er—my daughter-in-law.

(*LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves up.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. How do you do, Lady Sloane?

(*MRS. CUNNINGHAM turns to STELLA, back to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, and then to STELLA again. STELLA's back is turned; she gives a curt nod without turning round.*)

STELLA. How do you do.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Pray be seated, Mrs. Cunningham.

(SLOANE *puts forward a chair L. of table in line with settee R.C.* MRS. CUNNINGHAM *sits down, and* LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *sits on settee L.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. A mild day for the time of the year.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. There's a touch of east in the wind, though. (*Rises.*) Always gets in my weak spot.

(*He indicates his head, and then his liver. Then he moves to SLOANE, who is above* MRS. CUNNINGHAM, *L. of her.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I have explained to my son and—his wife—why I have enlisted your services, Mrs. Cunningham. Lady Sloane, I regret to say, has some slight objection to the arrangement.

STELLA (*turning sharply*). That's not true; my objections are not slight. (*Comes down below settee.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*placidly*). But they are not insuperable, I hope, Lady Sloane?

STELLA (*coming across stage towards* MRS. CUNNINGHAM). I don't know what you mean, but I do know that I won't stand being bullied and badgered morning, noon and night by anybody. (*She flounces back to settee L., and sits on the lower end of it.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Do you know, you quite frighten me. I had no idea that bullying and badgering were to be part of my duties. I thought I was going to be of service to you.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*rising, SLOANE opens door back*). Perhaps if you have a quiet talk with—er—my daughter-in-law, you will be able to convince her of the wisdom of the arrangement. Come, Edward. (*Crosses to* STELLA.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*behind table*). Right you are, my dear.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*pats* STELLA *on shoulder*). Good-bye, Stella.

STELLA (*very quietly*). Good afternoon!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*moves up to door. To* SLOANE). If you can't persuade your wife to cancel her engagement for Tuesday . . . I shall expect to see you on Wednesday next at Dewhurst. . . . Good-bye, Sloane!

SLOANE (*comes down back of settee, and taps* STELLA *on the shoulder*). I'll just see mother downstairs, darling.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *goes out with* SLOANE.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*sits beside* STELLA—*pats her hand*). Cheer up, little woman. It'll be all right. I'll see you have a good time at Dewhurst.

STELLA (*tearfully*). I know you will, if you can. But they won't let you.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. They! They? (*Rises.*) Who's they? I'd like to see them trying to stop me. Nonsense! We're going

to have a great time! Why, you're going to teach me to dance the—er—the Can-Can-Can-Go! (*He points toe and strikes attitude.*) Oh, we'll have lots of fun. . . . Now then, come along—

(*She rises.*)

—like a dutiful daughter, (*Holding out his hands to her*) and give me a kiss.

STELLA (*rises*). You dear!

(*STELLA obeys with alacrity, and gives him a big hug. LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE chuckles.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Gad! In my opinion, Sloane's—Toddles—between ourselves—Toddles!—is a lucky dog! He always was. When he was quite a little boy—oh, my goodness, my wife— (*Suddenly remembers.*) Well, well, I must be going. (*Goes up for hat, etc.*) What will my wife. . . . Good afternoon, Mrs. Cunningham, good afternoon. (*Takes hat, etc., off bookcase up L., and opens door.*)

(*STELLA moves up R. of door.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Fond of your new daddy, eh?

(*STELLA kisses her hand to him and he to her.*)

Bless her. (*He bustles out.*)

(*STELLA stands looking after him, her back to MRS. CUNNINGHAM.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. You have made a conquest of your father-in-law.

(*No answer.*)

You have made a conquest of your father-in-law.

STELLA. I heard you. I'm not deaf. Lady Knightsbridge hates me. (*Crosses behind table to fire-place.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. My dear, you mustn't feel downcast because you haven't made an immediate conquest of her. It's comparatively easy for a pretty woman to charm the men of a family, but it's a different matter when it comes to their womenfolk; and, believe me, it's the womenfolk who count. . . . Why not set out to capture Lady Knightsbridge?

STELLA (*half turns to MRS. CUNNINGHAM*). I could have done it—I think I could—in time—but that beast, Lady Honoria, came and upset everything, and now you're here to raise every devil I've got in me. (*At fire-place.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*calmly*). Oh, no! I'm not here for that at all.

STELLA (*faces her*). What right had Lady Knightsbridge to bring you here?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. I don't know.

STELLA. Nor I.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. But since I am here, I should like to be of service to you.

STELLA. Then go, and leave me in peace. (*At fire-place.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. If you really wish it, but I should very much like to help you to get rid of those devils you spoke of just now. They are tiresome companions.

STELLA. I never had them at all until to-day.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. You mentioned Lady Honoria. Did you mean Lady Honoria Nesbitt?

STELLA. Yes. Do you know her?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. I have met her.

STELLA (*coming to settee*). Isn't she the most ghastly mistake that God ever made?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. She is a little—unusual.

STELLA. That's a mercy, anyhow. (*Sits settee R.C.*) She's as artificial as you make 'em; but Lady Knightsbridge likes her—and hates me!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Let me try and help you to change that.

STELLA. Oh, she'll always hate me. She'll never forget this afternoon. I did so want to like her. Toddles—my husband—told me she was severe, but I liked her the moment I saw her. That cold calm manner of hers—it's wonderful. I don't care much what my husband's family think of me—with the exception of her. (*Wistfully.*) I would like her not to hate me. But I suppose I've done for myself. She'll never forget this afternoon.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Come! You and I—if you will allow me to help—will make her forget.

STELLA. I don't see why you should want to help me. I was jolly rude about you. I told her I wouldn't have a bear-leader.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. I quite appreciate your feelings. I think I should have said much the same if I'd been in your place. But I'm not such an ogre as you expected, am I?

STELLA. You're not a bit what I expected.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. And neither are you what I expected—you're something much, much nicer.

STELLA. Well, after the way I've behaved to you, it's jolly sporting of you to say that.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Then you won't think of me as a bear-leader any longer? Only as a friend.

STELLA. I promise—only as a friend in need.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*with real appreciation*). Thank you, dear. (*They kiss.*) Now tell me more about yourself.

STELLA. Myself?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Are your parents living ?

STELLA. No.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*gently*). Oh, I'm sorry.

STELLA (*face to audience*). You needn't be. It's a mercy. Father was a padre—till they found him out. Then they un—what's the word?—not undressed him, but something like it.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Unfrocked him ?

STELLA. That's it. He was a dead wrong 'un. He deserted mother. She was his housekeeper. I remember she used to say that he prayed on his knees on Sunday, but on his neighbours all the rest of the week. I was very fond of mother, but I was glad when the end came, she suffered so.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. And what made you take to the stage ?

STELLA. Mother kept lodgings down in Bloomsbury—one of those streets off Russell Square—and a pantomime manager who used to stay there saw me, and engaged me as a fairy. I just loved it. He persuaded mother to let me be taught dancing properly. She was against my going on the stage, but she gave in, and there I was until the war came. Then I learnt to drive a car. That was how I first met Toddles. I used to drive him round when he left the hospital, and then when I went back to the Palladrome he used to come and see me there. Oh ! Those days ! He was such a dear. At last I agreed to marry him.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. I understand. Thank you for telling me your story.

(*A repeated knocking at the door back.*)

STELLA. Come in.

(*Enter the HON. ARCHIBALD WENTWORTH. ARCHIE is a young man of about twenty, good-looking, and very well dressed in a tail coat and top hat. He is a typical man about town, who wishes to give the impression of being the "devil of a dog" as he would himself express it. He has a pleasant breezy personality which is frank and disarming, and a cheery smile that makes him very popular wherever he goes. To his mother he is the black sheep of the family, for he has that straightforwardness of youth that is such a part of Stella's character. He has always looked up to his brother as a being entirely superior to himself, and now is all eagerness to meet his wife. He comes forward with some embarrassment.*)

ARCHIE. I say, may I come in ?

STELLA (*rising*). I've just told you to. Who are you ?

ARCHIE (*coming down L.C.*). Are you—er—Lady Sloane ?

STELLA (*crosses to C.*). Is that what you call telling me who you are ?

ARCHIE. But are you ?

STELLA. Yes—but what's that got to do with you ?

ARCHIE. Lots! I'm your brother-in-law.

STELLA. Oh! Are you Archie?

ARCHIE. That's me—at your service.

STELLA (*genuinely pleased*). I say, I'm awfully glad to see you. Toddles has told me such a lot about you.

ARCHIE (*laughing*). Toddles? Oh! Is that what you call Sloane?

STELLA (*nervously*). Well—er—I did—(*Looks at Mrs. CUNNINGHAM*)—but I'm not going to any longer. Lady Knightsbridge doesn't like it. . . . Er—let me introduce you to Mrs. Cunningham—my brother-in-law. (*Crosses L.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*smiling pleasantly*). How d'you do?

ARCHIE. Top-hole, thanks.

(*He crosses to Mrs. CUNNINGHAM and shakes hands with her, and as he does so he turns and looks at STELLA admiringly. He at length realises that he is still holding Mrs. CUNNINGHAM's hand, and he drops it abruptly.*)

I say, you know, you're not a bit what I expected.

STELLA (*L., bitterly*). I don't seem to be what anybody expected. I'm a nasty jar all round.

ARCHIE (*C., coming down*). Don't you believe it! I'm all for you—and so's the guv'nor.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*quietly*). And so am I.

ARCHIE. That's three to two—nine to four on! Some price!

STELLA. Especially for an outsider.

ARCHIE. Outsider be hanged! It's got to be some favourite to start at that price.

STELLA (*reflectively*). Three to two! Ah! That means you've seen your people since they were here.

ARCHIE. Yes, funnily enough, I was on the way to the Club, and ran into 'em at the corner of Curzon Street.

STELLA (*sternly*). Why didn't you go on to the Club.

ARCHIE (*awkwardly*). Well—er—hearing that you were in, I thought it'd be a good opportunity to call and pay my respects, don't you know.

STELLA (*with cold anger*). In other words, you've come out of curiosity to see what sort of impossible creature it is your brother's married!

ARCHIE. Oh, I say! Don't talk like that! It puts me off.

STELLA. Can you deny it?

ARCHIE (*feeling very uncomfortable*). Well—er—after what they said, naturally I felt curious to meet you.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*trying to explain*). Of course, Mr. Wentworth—

STELLA (*silences Mrs. CUNNINGHAM*). What did they say?

ARCHIE. Oh—er—I dunno. The guv'nor seemed jolly bucked. He cracked you up no end.

STELLA. And was Lady Knightsbridge bucked.

ARCHIE. Oh, well—er—she's a bit difficult to please. Not a bad sort, don't you know, but inclined to be a bit stiff and starchy.

STELLA (*coming forward slightly*). What was *her* verdict?

ARCHIE. I—er—I don't really remember. She—er—said something about "having a lot to learn," and all that sort of rot.

STELLA. Shall I tell you what she said? (*Moving down.*) I can just hear her.

(*She gives a capital imitation of LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE'S voice and manner.*)

"Impossible, my boy—quite impossible." (*Moves L.*)

ARCHIE (*gaping in admiration*). By Gad! how did you know? You've got her to a T!

STELLA. Oh! (*She turns and moves back a step.*) And how did your charming cousin express her opinion?

ARCHIE. The sainted Honoria?

(*STELLA nods and ARCHIE chuckles.*)

Oh, I can remember quite well what she said. You know the way she smiles when she's going to say something that she thinks'll be particularly cutting?

STELLA. Don't I just!

ARCHIE. Well, that's how she smiled at me and said: "You'll like her, Archie—if you're as fond of brown sugar as you used to be."

STELLA (*vaguely*). Brown sugar?

ARCHIE. That's the name she's given you—"Brown Sugar."

STELLA. I don't see the point.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. It would sound as though she thought you very sweet.

STELLA. Oh, rats to that! She thinks I'm the pink limit, just as I think she is! . . . What does it mean, Archie?

ARCHIE. Well! What's the difference between brown sugar and white?

STELLA. I give it up.

ARCHIE (*wishing he had not been so voluble*). Well—er—white sugar's highly refined, and—er—

STELLA. Oh, I see! (*Up c.*) Ha! ha! Very smart of "Matchsticks"—I don't think!

ARCHIE (*puzzled*). Matchsticks?

STELLA. That's my name for *her*. Haven't you heard about the leg episode? (*She moves down a few steps.*)

ARCHIE (*moves to settee L., delighted at the thought*). Oh, lord, yes! Gad! I wish I'd been here when that happened. (*Sits.*)

STELLA (*with assumed stiffness*). If you had been here it would not have happened. (*Crosses to ARCHIE.*)

ARCHIE. That takes me off.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Is this something fresh?

STELLA. We were talking about riding. Lord Knightsbridge said he'd give me a horse, and I told him that I'd got a good leg for a boot. (*She turns her back to the audience, kicks out her leg, and goes up stage. She then turns back again.*) I showed him that I had, and—my giddy aunt! Lady Knightsbridge went off the deep end. (*Comes down.*) Then Honoria made some rotten remark about chorus girls and legs, and that rattled me so that I challenged her to a competition—her legs against mine. Of course, she funk'd it, and so I called her "Matchsticks."

ARCHIE (*hugely delighted*). Topping! Topping! And they are matchsticks, too! I've bathed with her, so I know.

STELLA (*eagerly*). I say!—don't you like Honoria?

ARCHIE (*rises*). Like her! By Jove, no! I detest her!

STELLA (*rushes up to him impulsively and kisses him, throwing her arms round his neck*). Oh, you dear!

(STELLA raises his head, puts her hand under his chin, and observes him closely.)

STELLA. I say, haven't I seen you before, somewhere?

ARCHIE (*with an affectation of being a devil of a dog*). Very likely. I go about a goodish bit, don't you know.

STELLA. Where was it?

ARCHIE (*self-consciously*). I—I used to come to your theatre a bit at one time—ha!—ha!

STELLA. Then that's where I've seen you. I remember now. (*Holding her finger up at him.*) But in rotten company.

ARCHIE. Oh, I say!—dash it all!

STELLA. Yes, you used to go there with a fellow called—what on earth is his name?—(*Pausing to think*)—Carruthers—that's it! Crobie Carruthers—a perfect pig of a man!

ARCHIE. Old Carrie a pig? Why, he's a deuced good sort! He's coming to Dewhurst next week to stay.

STELLA. Oh, crikey! That man and Honoria! Hellup! (*Crosses down R.*)

ARCHIE (L.C.). I say—was Honoria rude to you this afternoon?

STELLA (R.C.). About as rude as—(*She moves forward two steps, catches MRS. CUNNINGHAM'S eye, and corrects herself*)—as I was to her.

ARCHIE (*judicially*). Then I should think the honours were fairly even—what?

STELLA. I wish I hadn't been. It was that upset your mother's apple-cart.

ARCHIE. Mother's no sportswoman. I wish I'd been here!

STELLA. Archie, I want your mother to like me. (*Crosses c.*)

ARCHIE. Do you now? How funny!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*rises*). Lady Sloane is going to bring your mother round, and I'm going to help her. Will you be our ally?

ARCHIE. Rather! Hold on! All depends what it's likely to lead me into. Mother wants a bit of handling, you know.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. We want to counteract Lady Honoria's influence.

ARCHIE. Oh, if that's all, I'm with you. I've got a little score against Honoria myself I'd like to pay off.

STELLA. Then you're on our side?

ARCHIE. Every time.

STELLA (*determinedly*). I'm going to win your mother over.

ARCHIE. Then take a tip straight from the horse's mouth—humour her.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Our plan is to humour her so that when we come to Dewhurst—

ARCHIE. Are you coming to Dewhurst? Ripping! When?

STELLA. Next week.

ARCHIE. What day?

STELLA. Well, your mother said Tuesday, but *I* said—
(*Struck with an idea she rushes impulsively to the table.*) Never mind what *I* said . . . I'll do it!

ARCHIE. What's up now?

(*Enter SLOANE at back.*)

Hallo, Sloane!

SLOANE. Hallo, Archie! Where have you sprung from?

STELLA (*writing at table*). Corner of Curzon Street, where he met your people. Heard that you'd married the worst woman in London—

(*ARCHIE laughs, and moves down L.*)

—so naturally took a taxi straight away to see her.

ARCHIE. Oh, I say.

SLOANE (*very annoyed*). You, too! This is too thick! (*To MRS. CUNNINGHAM.*) Mrs. Cunningham, I'm sorry this arrangement can't possibly stand—my mother should never have—

STELLA (*still writing—top R. corner of table*). No, no, Toddles—she stays, she's one of us.

(*She jumps up waving telegraph form—dramatically.*)

United we stand—together we fall—on mother!

SLOANE (*not understanding a word*). Fall on mother? . . . I say, Stella—
(*Comes in front of settee R.C.*)

(*STELLA comes down to SLOANE.*)

STELLA. Read this! Dispatch from Head-quarters. Orders for the day.

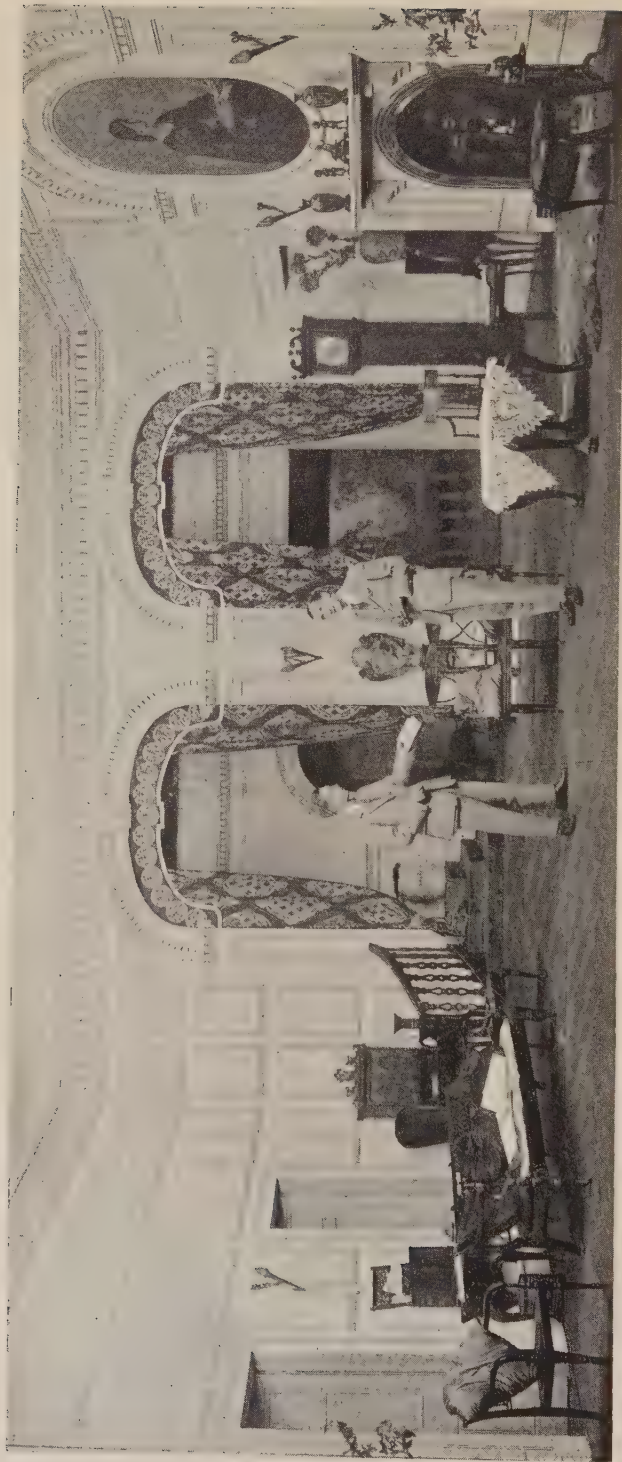
SLOANE (*reading the telegram, completely in the dark, and ignoring all the stops*). To Ninon de Vaux, Palladrome Theatre, London. "Sorry, old girl, dance is off. Going to Dewhurst Tuesday to visit mother-in-law. Help! Stella."

(SLOANE, *grasping the situation, beams with delight.*)

SLOANE. Stella! You're a brick!

(STELLA and SLOANE *embrace*; ARCHIE *shakes hands with* MRS. CUNNINGHAM *eagerly.*)

CURTAIN.



To face page 35.]

ACT II

SCENE.—*The sitting hall at Dewhurst, Lord Knightsbridge's Country Seat. It is large, airy, and comfortably furnished, and is used rather for meeting and sitting in than merely for passing through.*

At back R.C. is the principal entrance through an arch which gives access to the outer hall and servants' quarters, whilst a portion of the stairs leading to the upper rooms is visible. Another arch L.C. of back wall leads to the French window from which the grounds are seen. A large fire-place is on the L. wall, above it a door leading to the drawing-room. On the R. wall a door down stage gives entrance to the billiard-room and a door above leads to the library.

The principal furniture consists of a writing-table against the R. wall between the two doors, a large settee R. set up and down stage, a smaller settee L.C., and a tea-table L. There are plenty of cushions about, giving an air of comfort. Some rare vases and choice furniture complete a room which gives a general effect of comfort, luxury, and good taste.

Autumn foliage and chrysanthemums in the vases mark the period—October—a month later than the first act. It is a bright afternoon and the window is open.

(The curtain rises, disclosing CARRUTHERS seated on settee R., glancing through the pages of the "Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic.")

He is one of those men who turns the "sport of kings" into the "sport of fools." Whatever he does, he does for his own gain, and he assists others only when it costs him nothing to do it. He is an adventurer in every sense of the word, made adventurer by circumstances rather than inclination. Under the surface over-polished with affectedly suave manners, there is a roughness that shows that he has not always found life easy or comfortable. Circumstances have placed him in a society to which he is as strange as is STELLA: how they both survive this we are to see in the near future.

SAUNDERS, the butler, enters from the hall at back carrying a telegram on a salver. He hands it to CARRUTHERS.)

SAUNDERS. Telegram for you, sir—reply paid.

CARRUTHERS. Ah! *(Rises and reads it.)* Boy waiting?

SAUNDERS. Yes, sir.

(CARRUTHERS crosses to the writing-desk and fills in the reply-form. He then tears the telegram into small fragments and drops them into the waste-paper basket. SAUNDERS meanwhile puts the table-cover straight.)

CARRUTHERS (crosses R.C., and hands form to SAUNDERS). Make him read it to you, will you? See that he gets it right.

SAUNDERS (R.C.). P'raps I'd better read it over to you first, sir.

CARRUTHERS (by settee R.). P'raps you had.

SAUNDERS. To—er—"Fairdoss" is it, sir?

CARRUTHERS. "Fairdoos"—same thing.

SAUNDERS. "Fairdos' London—H.N. account another . . .

(He hesitates.)

CARRUTHERS. Century.

SAUNDERS (R.C.). Oh, I see, sir. Couldn't quite read the word. "H.N. account another century Retrenchment to win—Carruthers."

CARRUTHERS (R.). That's right.

(He brings a collection of loose coins from his pocket, selects a sixpence, and gives it to SAUNDERS.)

CARRUTHERS. Give that to the boy for himself. (Crosses L. to tea-table.)

SAUNDERS. Very good, sir.

(He turns to go; checks himself, and then hesitates.)

Excuse me, sir, but "Retrenchment's" running in the Cesarewitch, isn't he?

CARRUTHERS. Yes. Why?

SAUNDERS. Well, sir, I—I've backed "Buchan" to win, and "Sullion" for a place. I didn't know that "Retrenchment" had a chance, but if you're on him, sir—

CARRUTHERS. You've picked two good horses. I should stick to 'em if I were you. Always back your fancy—that's my motto. There's been a lot of talk about "Retrenchment" lately, but I don't know that it amounts to much. He's just a good outsider, and I thought him worth a flutter.

SAUNDERS. Then you wouldn't advise me, sir, to—?

CARRUTHERS. No. The odds don't make it worth your while to hedge. If you want to do anything—what about "Old Bill"?

SAUNDERS. Thank you, sir. I hope you don't mind me havin' taken the liberty—

CARRUTHERS. That's all right, Saunders.

(NOTE.—Names of Horses "ad lib.")

SAUNDERS. Thank you, sir.

(He turns to go, at arch R.C.)

CARRUTHERS. Oh, by the way——

(SAUNDERS stops.)

--I left the *Sportsman* in the billiard-room this morning. D'you know what's become of it? It's got some notes pencilled on the margin.

SAUNDERS. I'll inquire, sir. *(Going down behind settee.)*

(Exit SAUNDERS R.I.E. CARRUTHERS moves up L. to window.)

(STELLA comes merrily down the stairs, and dances into the hall.)

STELLA *(calling)*. Toddles—Toddles—— *(She recognizes CARRUTHERS and pulls up. Coldly.)* Oh! I thought my husband was here. *(Is about to go out again.)*

CARRUTHERS. Shall I find him for you?

STELLA. It doesn't matter, thank you. *(Turning away.)* Don't let me interrupt your business.

CARRUTHERS. My—er—business. *(Coming down L. of C. settee.)*

STELLA. Yes. "Business as usual"—that's your motto, isn't it?

CARRUTHERS. Sometimes; but just now I'm out to enjoy myself. Therefore I beg that you'll give me the pleasure of your company for a few moments.

STELLA *(coming down to settee R.)*. There's another motto that you may have heard, Mr. Carruthers. It's something about not trying to catch old birds with chaff.

CARRUTHERS *(coming R.C.—gravely)*. Oh, but I assure you that I wasn't chaffing.

STELLA. Never mind that. . . . Where's Archie? *(Sits on settee R. and picks up the paper, and glances at it throughout the following scene.)*

CARRUTHERS. Round at the garage, admiring his new car. He's an amusing person—so delightfully young.

STELLA *(pointedly)*. And green!—or you and he wouldn't be pals.

CARRUTHERS *(imperturbably)*. You think I'm too old—er—to—share his enthusiasm.

STELLA. I think a jolly sight more than that, and there's no need to tell you what I *do* think. You weren't born yesterday, my friend!

CARRUTHERS. Am I to take that as a compliment or a reproach?

STELLA *(contemptuously)*. If I know anything of you, you'll take it as a compliment.

CARRUTHERS. I don't know. To be born yesterday is—to say

the least of it—an error of judgment, but to let it be seen that one is more than a day old is more than an error—it's an imbecility.

STELLA. That sounds to me like so much hot air.

CARRUTHERS. On the contrary, dear lady. It's the quintessence of wisdom, engendered by a long experience. If you ever studied Plautus—

(Ironical look from STELLA.)

—you will recollect the line—"Sapientias ætas condimentum est"—

STELLA. Swank!

CARRUTHERS.—"Wisdom is the food of age." How should you—not yet having grown your wisdom teeth—be expected to appreciate it.

STELLA. I don't know who Plautus was, and I don't care a tuppenny—

(CARRUTHERS stops her by a gesture.)

—er—I do not care twopence what he said. But if it requires wisdom teeth to appreciate you, then I hope I'll never grow 'em.

CARRUTHERS. I hope you won't. I fear they'd be only four more for you to have into me.

STELLA. Now you *are* talking wisdom.

CARRUTHERS. Let's see—er—what was it led to this very interesting discussion? . . . Oh, yes—my mention of Archie. Now what have I done to Archie that's annoyed you?

STELLA. It isn't so much what you *have* done as what you *haven't* done. . . . Why don't you stop him gambling?

CARRUTHERS. *Does* he gamble?

STELLA *(impatiently)*. Oh! What's the good of trying to kid me? You know as well as I do that he does.

CARRUTHERS. Most young men do a bit that way, you know.

STELLA. Then why don't their "wise" friends tell them what a mug's game it is?

CARRUTHERS. After all, money was made to be circulated!

STELLA. Was it? . . . Poor Archie's circulation is about perfect, I should think. How's yours?

CARRUTHERS. Er—well—er—

STELLA. A bit sluggish, eh? I expect it semi-circulates.

CARRUTHERS. Ha! ha! What a quaint way you have of putting things.

STELLA. That's "quaint," is it? *(Puts down paper and becoming serious.)* Well, then, what's this?—When Archie loses, how much do you gain?

CARRUTHERS. I don't quite follow you.

STELLA. It's a simple question.

CARRUTHERS. H'm! It's comparatively easy to ask a simple question, but not always so easy to return a simple answer.

STELLA. I thought you'd find it a poser.

CARRUTHERS. In different circumstances the answer would be perfectly simple; but you're a woman, and so—er——

STELLA. Thank goodness you didn't call me a lady.

CARRUTHERS. Of course not.

STELLA (*smiling, in spite of herself*). That's one up to you. But you haven't answered my question.

CARRUTHERS. Shall I tell you a secret?

STELLA. One that everybody knows, I suppose.

CARRUTHERS. No—at present it's between Archie and myself.

STELLA. That's dangerous—for Archie.

CARRUTHERS. Fortunately, I've been able to help him out of a tight place.

STELLA (*rises and faces him*). Into a tighter. I suspected it. I've met you before, Mr. Carruthers—I don't suppose you remember it, but you diddled a friend of mine, Ninon de Vaux, out of half of the money she should have had from young Derwent.

CARRUTHERS. Ah, so it was over that business we met, was it? Derwent was a friend of mine.

STELLA. He would be.

CARRUTHERS. And the girl's demands were preposterous.

STELLA. Never mind about that, but I warn you—I'm up against you in this house, and if I can queer your pitch I shall. So that's that.

CARRUTHERS (*majestically*). I am grieved you should take this attitude, dear Lady Sloane, but it's some consolation to feel that in you I have a foeman worthy of my steel.

STELLA. Your steel! (*Crosses to fire-place*.) You can use pig-iron if you like! It's all the same to me. I'm going to do you down, if I can.

(*Enter ARCHIE by hallway R.C., carrying a letter.*)

ARCHIE (*holding letter*). Here you are, Carrie. I'll write Hawley after tea. He'll be ever so grateful for the introduction. (*Gives CARRUTHERS letter.*)

STELLA (*L., satirically*). Ha!

ARCHIE. Hallo, Stella, what's up? (*U.R. of C. settee.*)

STELLA. Business as usual. That's all.

(*Enter SAUNDERS with "Sportsman" D.R.I.E.*)

SAUNDERS (*to CARRUTHERS*). The *Sportsman*, sir, with your notes in the margin.

(*SAUNDERS hands paper to CARRUTHERS across settee and exits into hallway U.R.C.*)

(*STELLA gives another mocking laugh.*)

CARRUTHERS. Thank you, Saunders. (*Looking at wrist-watch.*)

Good gracious—how late it's getting. I must go and tackle my correspondence. (*Going up to door 2.R.E.*)

STELLA. Oh, *must* you!

CARRUTHERS. Yes. (*Looking at STELLA affectedly.*) I really think I must.

(*Exit CARRUTHERS 2.R.E.*)

STELLA. Thank goodness!

ARCHIE (*moving to tea-table*). I say, Stella, why are you always so rotten to old Carrie?

STELLA (*by fire-place*). I don't like him.

ARCHIE. Why?

STELLA. I don't like the way he shakes hands. A fishy shake with a coddly hand. Ugh! (*Wagging an admonitory finger at him.*) Always distrust men with hands like hake.

ARCHIE. Rot! There's nothing fishy about old Carruthers.

STELLA (*comes in front of table*). Isn't there? Well, I happen to know he's a damned hypocrite. Oh! (*Putting her hand before her mouth.*)

ARCHIE (*pretending to be shocked*). Phew!

STELLA. I'm sorry. It's the first time to-day—really.

ARCHIE (*R. of table, imitating LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). Well, my dear Stella, it's something to know that you're really making an effort to improve.

STELLA (*laughing*). You're a cheeky little beast, Archie! . . . But, seriously, you don't know what a struggle it is to stick to "Bother it"—when you feel like saying—well—you're too young to be told. Why should everything really expressive be bad form? Bright colours, for example?

ARCHIE. I don't know. I'm all for a bit of colour myself. And you can stand things that other people couldn't.

STELLA. That's quite true. I've had to stand a lot more than most people would, lately. (*Sits L. of table.*)

ARCHIE. Take Honoria, for example. She could never have stood that hat you wore yesterday.

STELLA. Honoria—oh, Lord! Why did you remind me of her? I've been trying to forget she's coming back. I've quite enjoyed these last few days without her.

ARCHIE. Honoria's a rotter—always was. But, all the same, I can't help feeling rather sorry for her.

STELLA. Why should you be sorry for her?

ARCHIE. Well, for one thing, she's had beastly bad luck racing.

STELLA. Serves her right. She doesn't do it out of charity; she'd fleece the other people if she could. If she hasn't learnt yet that gambling's a mug's game, then she ought to have done. (*Viciously.*) It isn't because she isn't old enough.

ARCHIE (*laughs, and then suddenly becomes serious*). A mug's

game. You're right there—it is. (*Moves R. A significant pause.*) Er—er—by the way, Stella, I wish you'd be a bit nicer to Carruthers. . . . You see—er—I—er—

STELLA (*rises*). I can guess what's coming! How much do you owe him? (*Coming C.*)

ARCHIE (*taken aback*). How d'you know I owe him anything! (*Suspiciously.*) I say, old Carrie hasn't been sneaking to you, has he? (*Moves to her.*)

STELLA (*C.*). Not on your life! He's much too cute an old crow to peach on a fluffy little pigeon like you, my dear.

ARCHIE (*ruffled*). Fluffy little pigeon be—!

STELLA. Bothered. . . . Oh, Archie, you— (*She puts her hands to her head to make long ears, and makes the sound of a donkey's bray.*) He-haw!

ARCHIE (*sulkily*). That's right! Go on! Rub it in!

STELLA. What's the damage?

ARCHIE. Well, it's—er—look here, what d'you want to know for?

STELLA (*jokingly*). So that I can run straight away and tell mamma!

ARCHIE. I say!—do stop rotting about it. It's no joke. (*Sits settee R.*)

(*STELLA seats herself beside him, and slips her arm through his.*)

STELLA (*sympathetically*). Then come on, old boy. Tell me all about it. How much do you owe Carruthers?

ARCHIE. Well, there's the three hundred that I dropped at Epsom that he squared for me.

STELLA. Well?

ARCHIE. Then another couple of hundred at Ascot—that was astonishing bad luck.

STELLA. Five hundred. Any more?

ARCHIE. Yes. I—I went a buster at Goodwood, to try and put myself right—went all out on a forty to one chance. Carrie put me on to it—thought it was a dead cert.

STELLA (*rises*). A dead cert—to lose! What's it tot up to altogether?

ARCHIE. Somewhere about a thousand.

STELLA (*whistles*). Phew!

ARCHIE. I didn't think it was as much as that, but, of course, Carrie knows. You see, he didn't exactly lend me the money himself, he had to get it from some other fellow, and, of course, there's the interest to be paid.

STELLA. Fifty per cent at least. I told you that our friend had fishy hands.

ARCHIE (*anxiously*). I say—you won't mention this to Sloane.

STELLA. Why didn't you ask *him* to help you out, instead of going to that creature?

ARCHIE (*rising—shamefacedly*). Well—er—to tell you the truth, I've bitten his ear before.

STELLA. Ah!

ARCHIE. And last time I sort of well—promised it shouldn't happen again.

STELLA. I see.

ARCHIE (*crosses L.*). Sloane's so devilish straight he'd—well, you know what I mean—I didn't want him to feel he'd got a rotter for a brother.

STELLA (*R.C., after reflection*). Look here, Archie—if I get you out of this mess, will you promise me never to go to that blighter again?

ARCHIE (*L.C.*). I say, you know, you're not being fair to Carrie.

STELLA. Promise!

ARCHIE (*laughing at her persistence*). If you can get me out of this mess, I s'pose I'll have to, though I don't see how the deuce you're going to manage it. But Carrie's been such a good pal to me that—

STELLA. He's not left you a bean to call your own. Crobie Carruther's friendship is a luxury you can't afford, my little man. (*Goes R.*)

(*Enter SLOANE by door U.L., passing by back of couch to C. He carries his hat in his R. hand, and Stella's bag in L. hand, both behind his back.*)

(*ARCHIE puts his finger to his lips.*)

SLOANE. Oh, there you are, Archie, mother wants you.

ARCHIE. Oh, confound and hang it! No peace, even for the moderately-wicked, in this life! Where is she? (*Goes up between C. settee and tea-table towards door U.L.*)

SLOANE. In her boudoir.

ARCHIE. That means she's got the hump! She never goes there at any other time. I'm going to enjoy myself—I don't think! Tootle-oo!

(*Exit door U.L.*)

(*SLOANE C. addresses his wife with mock severity.*)

SLOANE. Now, young woman, come here! Have you lost anything?

STELLA (*R., observing that he has his hands behind his back, and craning her neck to try and catch a glimpse of what he holds*). What've you found?

SLOANE. That isn't answering my question.

STELLA (*with wrinkled brow*). I can't think of anything. . . . What is it, Toddles?

SLOANE (*taking his R. hand from behind his back*). Behold !
(*Shows hat.*)

STELLA. Your hat !

(SLOANE *discovers his mistake, and brings forward her bag, with a cheque-book sticking out.*)

STELLA. Oh, my bag ! Where did I leave it ?

SLOANE. In the morning-room—with your cheque-book sticking out of it.

STELLA. Is that a dreadful crime ?

SLOANE. It's hardly wise, my dear. You don't know who might come along and——

STELLA. Pinch it—purloin it, I mean. (*Hasty glance round at her slip.*) But what good would it be to them ?

SLOANE (*laughing*). Precious little, I should imagine, if I know anything of the state of your account. But, all the same, old girl, you ought to keep it locked up. It isn't fair to put temptation into people's way.

STELLA. I'll try to remember—I will really, Toddles—only you know I've not got used to having a cheque-book yet.

(*She crosses above settee over to the writing-desk R.*)

Will it be all right if I put it into this drawer for a few minutes ?
(*Puts book in drawer.*)

SLOANE. Yes, so long as you don't leave it there. . . . Now, come and be kissed !

STELLA (*sweetly*). Thank you. (*She moves over to him, dropping him a curtsy on the way. He holds her at arms' length adoringly.*)

SLOANE. D'you know you're looking jolly sweet this afternoon ?

STELLA. Me ?—or my frock ?

SLOANE. You, and everything about you. You're just the loveliest thing on earth, and I adore you—d'you know that, my woman ? Do you ?

STELLA (*puts her hands on his shoulders*). My man ! If you adore me half as much as I adore you, then——

SLOANE (*tenderly*). Then what—— ?

STELLA. Then God's been very, very good to me.

SLOANE. Bless her !

(*He takes her in his arms—a long embrace.*)

STELLA (*nestling her head against his shoulders*). Oh, Toddles, if only every moment of our lives could be like this. If only there didn't have to be to-morrow.

(*They move hand in hand to settee R.*)

SLOANE. My dear, "Why fret about it if to-day be sweet?"

STELLA (*sits lower end of settee*). I can't help it, Toddles. It's the thought of all those people coming down, and your mother's terror that I shall disgrace myself and all of you in front of them.

SLOANE (*sits above her, having put his hat on the top end of the settee*). Nonsense, darling! Mother's not afraid of anything of the sort.

STELLA. She is—I know it. I've seen her looking at me these last few days as though I was a sort of bomb that has been dropped into the middle of the family, and might be expected to go off at any moment.

SLOANE. Don't be a goose! (*Takes her hands.*)

STELLA. Really, I don't wonder that she's anxious. I *am* a bit bomb-like, Toddles. I do go off suddenly and bust things up—you can't deny it.

SLOANE. I can't deny that you have—but it's such a long time now since you "went off," as you call it, that you must almost have forgotten how to do it.

STELLA. Oh no, I haven't. Touch wood, Toddles! (*She touches end of settee.*) For Heaven's sake touch wood!—or I shall go off to-morrow—just when they're here—(*SLOANE laughingly puts his arms around her and touches the wood on the front of the settee*)—I know I shall!

SLOANE. I'm not a bit afraid of that. You've been a jolly good little girl since we came down here, and you deserve to be rewarded. Now, tell me something that you really want.

STELLA (*sees her opportunity*). Something that I really want. (*Rises, crosses c.*) There is something that I want dreadfully, so dreadfully that I was going to wait—(*hesitating*)—until after dinner to ask you for it.

SLOANE. H'm! That sounds expensive.

STELLA (*going slightly above him*). It is—horribly expensive. It's money that I want—a lot of it, all for my very own! secrets—dead secrets.

SLOANE (*fondly*). Well, dear?

STELLA (*leans over his shoulder*). Prepare for a shock. It's a lot! Hold tight! I want—

(*Enter, talking, LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE and MRS. CUNNINGHAM, from garden, LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE follows.*)

Your mother! Damn! Sh! Later on—when we're alone. (*She moves up slightly.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*R. of c. settee. To SLOANE, who rises and takes up hat*). Thank you, dear, for giving my message to Archie. . . . Are you going out? Tea'll be here in a moment.

SLOANE. I want to give Winslow some instructions for the shoot on Wednesday. I shan't be long, but don't wait tea for me.

(*Exit to billiard-room I.R.E.*)

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *has dropped over* U.R.C. MRS. CUNNINGHAM *by fire-place.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (C.). Very well, dear. . . . Well, Stella, what have you been doing with yourself since luncheon? Been for a walk?

STELLA. No. It was such a rotten—(*Catches* MRS. CUNNINGHAM'S *eye*)—ahem!—*unpleasant* afternoon, I couldn't face it. I've been messing about here. (*To* LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.) Where have you been hiding? As you weren't here to flirt with, I had to fall back on Toddles—Sloane.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *walks over* L., *gets magazine from table, and then returns to settee for cue.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*chuckling*). Another of life's golden opportunities missed. Heigho! But seeing that I wasn't to blame for missing it, perhaps I may be given another chance.

STELLA (*saucily*). We'll see. . . . I'm not so sure it's good for you at your time of life, though. I believe if you had half a chance, you gay old bird, you'd—

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (R. of *settee* L.C., L. of STELLA. *Reproachful and reproving*). Stella! Stella! Stella! Stella!

STELLA (*surprisedly*). What's the matter! I haven't said "damn," have I?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Not yet,—(*Sits on settee* L.C.)—but can't you understand that you mustn't talk to your father-in-law in that way? If our friends who are coming down here to-morrow heard you, I—I don't know what they'd think.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*chuckling*). I do—"Out of the mouths of babes and ducklings—"

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM *smiles and sits chair* L.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coldly*). Possibly—but that's beside the point.

STELLA (*coming to* LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, *whilst* LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *moves down* R.). I'm so sorry, Lady Knightsbridge, if I've vexed you. . . . Mrs. Cunningham, for goodness' sake shut me up every time I use a slang word. It's a beastly rotten habit.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*quietly*). *Unfortunate* habit, dear.

STELLA (*coming down*). Yes, damned *unfortunate*. (*Moving.*)

(*She is horrified by her slip, and there is a frigid silence.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*smiling, and looking at her watch*). Why haven't they brought tea in? I suppose they're waiting for Honoria. She's never punctual.

(STELLA *tiptoes up to back.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. The train must be late. Punctuality is the thief of time, and a late train is a perfect excuse for unpunctuality. (*Sits settee R.*)

STELLA (*turns*). Not in the theatre. My hat, you'd get socks if you were late for rehearsals. You should have heard old Gribble swear. (*Coming down to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Not at you, I hope?

STELLA. No, I wasn't late—at least, not often. Every one was awfully good to me at the theatre—always got on all right there, and the girls used to say I was a nailer at getting my own way. (*Reminiscently.*) I was the only one who could manage old Runcorn, the doorkeeper. He *was* an old curmudgeon, and no mistake,

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *shows signs of uneasiness.*)

and old Fiddlesticks—one of the chaps in the orchestra—had a lot of anxiety with him. His trouble was falling in love with us one after the other. Sometimes he hadn't quite finished with one before he got on to the next. There were dreadful ructions at times. I generally had to settle them. (*Triumphantly.*) But I cured him,—when it came to *my* turn! He got it, in the neck!

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *contracts her brow as though in pain.*)

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *turns aside to hide a smile.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. You mean, you gave him his congé.

STELLA. Do I? Did I? (*Coming c.*) I know I gave him *beans*! (*Turns up stage.*) And the funny part of it is that he's quite a famous man now. He composed that topping song that everybody's crazy over. (*To LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) You know the one—Ninon de Vaux's singing it at the Palladrome now—(*Sings first line of refrain*)—"I don't mean what you mean, my word! you've got a naughty mi——"

(*As she sings, she comes down towards the footlights. Suddenly she pulls herself up sharply, covers her mouth with her hands, and turns her back on the audience, moving away extreme R.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *hums the second line "sotto voce," until he catches LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE'S eye, when he hurriedly takes up a magazine, and looks laughingly at STELLA from behind it.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*wincing*). Good gracious! Is that the appalling thing that Archie put on the gramophone the other night? . . . I never heard anything *quite* so vulgar in all my life.

(SAUNDERS *enters from hall with tea.*)

(STELLA *agrees cheerfully.*)

STELLA (*crosses up to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). It is a bit thick, but it's a winner! I wish I'd had the chance of singing it.

(SAUNDERS *enters with tea, coming round the back of the table.*)

Good gracious! Here's tea! And I'm a perfect grub! I must just go and tidy up a bit. (*At foot of stairs.*) I shan't be a sec'.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*holding out hand*). I was going to suggest that you should pour out, Stella.

STELLA (*returning, and kissing her hand gratefully*). Oh, I say, how ripping of you! I'd love to. (*Runs back to stairs.*) I won't be two shakes of a lamb's tail.

(*Exit.*)

(SAUNDERS *leaves table as LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE nods to him.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*chuckling*). "Two shakes of a lamb's tail!" What delightful imagery! . . . A real ray of sunshine, eh, Mrs. Cunningham?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Yes—true gold.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. But unrefined—completely unrefined. She's a dear girl in many ways. She's got admirable qualities. But I despair of ever making a lady of her. When we were talking of that disgusting song just now, there's no doubt that when she said she wished she'd had the chance of singing it she meant it.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*rises, and crosses to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE above tea-table, speaking quietly*). But not because the song is vulgar, Lady Knightsbridge. Believe me, Lady Sloane has one of the sweetest minds I've ever known. When she said just now that the song is "a winner," she meant that it has made the name and fame of the actress who is singing it. After all, it is very harmless, you know. Why, the whole of Mayfair has flocked to the Palladrome to hear it sung, with the result that it is as popular—in the drawing-rooms of Berkeley Square as on the barrel-organs of the East End (*Retires to fire-place.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*clapping his hands*). Bravo! Bravo! Now what've you got to say to that, Emily?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Only that if society had been true to its traditions, and had realized the folly of mixing brown sugar with white, such things never could have been.

(*Enter CARRUTHERS 2.R.E.*)

Ah, Mr. Carruthers, you're just in time for tea.

CARRUTHERS. More food? I feel like the Irishman who said to his hostess, "You feed me so well that if I were to stay a month longer, I should die in a fortnight." (*Drops down B. behind settee.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ha! ha! Very good! I must remember that.

(HONORIA, in a motor-bonnet and veil, enters from the hall, followed by SAUNDERS. LORD and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE both rise to greet her.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah, there you are, my dear! (Kisses her.) Have you had a comfortable journey?

HONORIA. Quite, thanks. How is everybody?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. All as fit as fiddles. And you? (Shakes hands.)

HONORIA. Sadly in need of tuning up. But a few days at Dewhurst will soon do that for me. . . . Ah, Mr. Carruthers, still here I see. (Coming down R.)

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM picks up a magazine from the chair U.L. by the window and, joined by LORD and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, glances at it through the following scene between LADY HONORIA and CARRUTHERS.)

CARRUTHERS. Still here, dear lady, thanks to the generous indulgence of our hostess. (He bows to LADY HONORIA, who responds amiably.) It would have been hard to tear myself away even had I not known that you were returning.

HONORIA. Courtier! (Turning to SAUNDERS, who has followed her.) Saunders, take my cloak, please.

(SAUNDERS takes it and exits back to hall.)

(HONORIA places her wrap on settee R.)

HONORIA. Did you get my telegram? (Returning to CARRUTHERS.)

CARRUTHERS. Yes, I've put you on another hundred.

HONORIA. Do you know, I've been hearing some stories about you?

CARRUTHERS. All stories about me, dear lady, are some stories! I hope they were amusing.

HONORIA (with hidden meaning). I heard most of them from Lady Accrington.

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM returns to chair L., LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE to settee L.C., and LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves U.R.C.)

CARRUTHERS. Ah, dear Lady Accrington! How is she? Still mistaking prejudices for principles. I've not seen her for ages.

(Enter SAUNDERS with cakes, which he puts above table, and exits door U.R.)

HONORIA (pointedly). So I gathered. (She turns away and observes that tea has been brought in.) Ah! Tea! I'm simply dying for a cup. Shall I pour out, Aunt Emily? (Crosses to table.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I've asked Stella to do it, she'll be down in a moment.

HONORIA. Well, may I deputize for her until she comes? I think I know how you all take it. How do you do, Mrs. Cunningham? Still dealing with your intractable pupil? (*Shakes hands.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*annoyed*). Not at all.

HONORIA. Oh, I know.

(*She seats herself at tea-table and proceeds to pour out.*)

HONORIA. You still think "Retrenchment's" going to win tomorrow, Mr. Carruthers?

CARRUTHERS (*crossing to table*). Eh? Oh yes, yes. I've not a doubt of it. (*Takes cup from her.*)

HONORIA (*endeavouring not quite successfully to appear unconcerned*). You're in the minority, you know.

CARRUTHERS (*moving to R. of settee L. and handing cup to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). Ah! but who was it said "*the minority is always right.*"

HONORIA. Ibsen. Though it sounds more like a bookmaker's motto, doesn't it?

(*SLOANE enters from back R.*)

SLOANE (*comes down C. to tea-table*). Oh! How do you do, Honoria? I didn't know you had arrived. (*Shakes hands.*)

HONORIA. There was a time, dear Sloane, when my comings and goings were of some slight interest to you, but now—— (*A shrug completes the sentence.*) Tea?

SLOANE. No thanks,—I'll wait till Stella comes—

(*HONORIA is about to hand cup of tea to MRS. CUNNINGHAM when SLOANE says "Allow me," takes it, and moves L., handing the cup to MRS. CUNNINGHAM.*)

—I've just been up to her room, mother. She's awfully sorry, but she's torn her frock, and her maid's laid up, you know.

(*CARRUTHERS has handed cake to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, then to MRS. CUNNINGHAM.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*rising*). I'll go and help her.

(*LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE comes over to tea-table, takes cup of tea from HONORIA.*)

SLOANE. There's no need to trouble you, thanks, Mrs. Cunningham, one of the housemaids is with her. (*Moves to front of fire-place.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*R. of tea-table, pouring milk into cup*). I understand there's such a competition for the honour of ladies-maiding her that the girls are actually drawing lots as to who shall have the privilege. (*Taking cup and sitting chair above settee R.*)

HONORIA (*handing tea to CARRUTHERS*). Oh yes, it's easy enough to be popular in the servants' hall.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. I'm afraid I disagree with you, Lady Honoria. They see deeper than we do, and only the really sound qualities and virtues can make one popular with one's employés.

HONORIA. But who wants to be popular with one's employés—*except* one's employés?

(*Enter STELLA running down stairs quickly.*)

STELLA (C.). I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid I've kept you all waiting. I—— (*Stops abruptly, seeing HONORIA.*) Oh!

(*CARRUTHERS is at back of settee L., chatting to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, having finished his tea and put his cup on the mantelpiece.*)

HONORIA. Ah, my dear Stella, how nice you look. You might have known we were talking about you. (*Lazily holding out her hand.*) I've just been taking your place until you came.

STELLA (R. of table, just touching HONORIA's fingers). Thanks very much. How d'you do?

HONORIA. Oh, as well as can be expected in this atrocious weather. . . . I'll just pour out Sloane's tea, and then I'll retire.

STELLA (*coming forward*). I'd rather pour it out myself, if you don't mind. I know just how he likes it.

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE hands her cup to CARRUTHERS, who puts it on the mantelpiece.*)

HONORIA (*picks up sugar with tongs*). But so do I, my dear Stella. I think I learnt the secret before you did.

(*LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE rises.*)

STELLA (*knocks sugar away irritably*). He's changed lately. He doesn't like it as he used to. Please get up. (*Moves up to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*) Lady Knightsbridge asked me to pour out tea, didn't you?

(*CARRUTHERS picks up the lump of sugar that has been dropped on the floor, and puts it on the mantelpiece.*)

HONORIA (*without moving*). But mayn't I learn how to make Sloane's tea for him—in case I have to pour out some time when you're not here?

STELLA. Lady Knightsbridge, will you tell Honoria she's to get up?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming forward slightly*). Stella, dear—don't be childish.

(*STELLA stands irresolutely—fuming, then turns to the table again.*)

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *sits again, and CARRUTHERS speaks to her.*)

STELLA. I won't have Sloane kept waiting for his tea.

SLOANE (*in front of fire-place—shortly*). I don't want any, thanks.
(*Moves up L.*)

HONORIA (*rises*). Really? Then will you take my place, Stella?

STELLA (*almost beside herself*). You can stay where you are now.
(*Crosses R., to settee R. and sits.*)

HONORIA. Just as you like.

(*Enter ARCHIE from window back L.*)

ARCHIE (*coming C. and R. of tea-table*). Hallo everybody!
Eating as usual? . . . Oh, how do you do, Honoria?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*handing him cup*). Put this back, Archie.

(*ARCHIE takes it and crosses to tea-table.*)

HONORIA. Quite well, thanks, Archie. Tea?

(*She holds up the tea-pot interrogatively.*)

ARCHIE. No, thanks. (*Takes plate from table.*) I'll just have a snack. (*Helps himself generously to food, moves R.C., and turns back to audience. Looking round.*) You're a nice cheerful crowd—I don't think! What's the matter? Honoria been letting loose one of her funny stories? (*He grins.*)

HONORIA. Humour isn't your metier, Archie. Your appetite is more obvious in other directions.

ARCHIE (*none too politely*). If you mean that I can stomach things that you can't—and vice versa—good for me! (*Crosses to chair, R., and sits eating cakes.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*protesting*). Archie—dear!

(*SLOANE moves to MRS. CUNNINGHAM, offers her cigarette, which she takes, then he moves back to HONORIA.*)

HONORIA. Oh, don't reprove him, Aunt Emily! I love his delicate attempts at repartee. . . . Sloane, dear, may I have a cigarette?

(*SLOANE gives her one.*)

Thanks, so much.

(*SLOANE crosses above table and holds out his case to STELLA.*)

SLOANE. You, dear?

STELLA (*sullenly*). No, thanks.

SLOANE. Father? (*Crossing to him.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. No, thanks.

(CARRUTHERS moves down to MRS. CUNNINGHAM, and offers her a light, and then returns to back of the settee L.C.)

HONORIA. Well—and what have you all been doing with yourselves whilst I've been away—Stella?

STELLA (*rudely*). Enjoying myself.

HONORIA. Not *because* I've been away, I *hope*.

STELLA (*as before*). I didn't say so.

HONORIA. But you don't deny it.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*interposing*). I'm sure Stella, like the rest of us, is very pleased to see you back.

STELLA. I'm not a humbug.

HONORIA (*laughing affectedly*). Well, at least, you're frank.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*uncomfortably*). Ahem! (*He moves back chair and crosses up to cabinet U.R., and takes cigar-box from cabinet and offers it to SLOANE, who declines.*)

STELLA (*rises, crosses C. to HONORIA*). Why can't you be frank, too? You know that you loathe and detest me. Why don't you say so straight out instead of behaving like a treacherous cat that purrs and scratches all at the same time?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*rises*). Stella, you're being abominably rude!

HONORIA. My dear Aunt Emily, what is the use of protesting?
"On ne saurait faire d'une buse un epervier!"

SLOANE (*coming down R. of STELLA—deeply indignant*).
HONORIA! !

STELLA (*C.*). What's she mean, Sloane? She knows that I don't understand French.

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM rises, and moves up to fire-place.)

SLOANE. Never mind, dear. It doesn't matter.

STELLA. I suppose it is something so beastly that she daren't say it in English.

HONORIA (*contemptuously*). Daren't! Oh, if you want to hear the truth about yourself, it means that you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

(STELLA gasps, and there is general discomfiture. MRS. CUNNINGHAM rises, and moves up L.)

SLOANE (*to HONORIA, "sotto voce"*). Honoria! (*Moves up to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, U.R.C.*)

STELLA (*eyes flashing, every remnant of control deserting her*). Ho! So she thinks she's inimitable, does she? I'll soon show her!

(*She seizes the motor-veil HONORIA has left on settee R., drapes herself, and proceeds to travesty HONORIA's manner and speech.*)

Ah! Aunt Emily, how are you? And uncle—how is uncle?

Ah, Sloane—dear Sloane, 'tis indeed a precious moment. (*At HONORIA.*) How have you existed without your sainted Honoria? (*Turns to ARCHIE.*) Hallo, Archie! Naughty as usual. And Mr. Carruthers! You still think you can pick me out a "cert"? (*In her natural voice.*) Well? How's that for your rotten old silk purse?

(*HONORIA rises. LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE has come down, silenced ARCHIE, who is enjoying this immensely, and moves to STELLA R.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Stella! Please cease making an exhibition of yourself.

(*MRS. CUNNINGHAM goes up to window.*)

STELLA (*goes to the tea-table, and takes up the cake-tray*). Tea, anybody? I'm sure I know exactly how you all like it.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Honoria—I apologize for my—my daughter-in-law's extraordinary behaviour. . . . (*Pause.*) Will you please come to the drawing-room, Honoria.

(*She moves towards door, HONORIA following.*)

HONORIA. With pleasure, Aunt Emily.

(*Exeunt LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE and HONORIA by door L.*)

(*STELLA is conscious-stricken, but defiant, stands looking after them with heaving breasts.*)

(*CARRUTHERS moves back chair from tea-table to allow her to pass.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*after pause of general embarrassment—awkwardly to CARRUTHERS*). H'm! Ha! What do you say to a hundred up, Carruthers? (*Coming down.*)

CARRUTHERS. Delighted!

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*moving to door down R.*). You can come and mark for us, Archie. Bring your cakes. Have you got enough?

(*Exeunt I.R.E.*)

(*As CARRUTHERS passes STELLA, he whispers audibly.*)

CARRUTHERS. Brown Sugar for ever! Topping! Topping!!

(*Exit I.R.E.*)

(*SLOANE comes forward to R.C.*)

SLOANE. Stella, dearest!

STELLA (*hysterically*). Leave me alone! You take her part—I know you do. (*Crossing to settee R.*)

(*SLOANE lays his hand gently upon her shoulder, as she passes him. She shakes it off.*)

STELLA. Don't touch me! I hate you!

(Throws herself on couch and bursts into floods of tears.)

SLOANE *(hurt to the quick)*. Stella!—Darling!

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM comes from the window, touches SLOANE quietly on the shoulder, and indicates to him by a gesture that it would be better for him to leave for a few moments. He, with a grateful smile to her, exits through window to the garden.)

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM lays a soothing hand upon STELLA'S shoulder, sitting above her.)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Poor little girl!

STELLA *(repenting at once)*. Don't pity me! I don't deserve it! I was a perfect little beast. Oh, Mrs. Cunningham, I've done for myself—done for myself completely. *(Buries her face on MRS. CUNNINGHAM'S breast.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. No, no, my dear. It will all come right.

STELLA *(rises, crosses to C.)*. But Toddles—I went for him! What did I say? It must have been terrible—I saw his face.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Nothing that can't be mended, dear. He loves you.

STELLA. Oh, I must go to him at once. *(Moves up towards window.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM *(detaining her)*. I think your first duty is to Lady Knightsbridge. *(Rises.)*

STELLA. My first duty—to do what?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. To make your apologies to her, and to—Lady Honoria.

STELLA. Honoria! Nix on Honoria!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. 'Sh, dear! Lady Honoria may have been very trying, but *you* were in the wrong. There's no getting away from it. *(She holds out a hand appealingly.)* To please Lord Sloane.

STELLA. Oh, yes!—anything!—anything to put things right with Toddles! *(She advances, then hesitates again.)* But Honoria!—no! I can't do it, Mrs. Cunningham. It's too much to expect of anyone. *(Seeing MRS. CUNNINGHAM'S look of disappointment.)* Oh, but I will! I won't let Toddles down. Only, you must tell me what to say.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Don't worry about that, dear—the words will come.

STELLA. Yes—they will—if I'm not careful. How shall I begin?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. I should just say “Honoraria—I'm sorry—in a moment of uncontrollable emotion I—er—I forgot that your sensibilities might be wounded by—er—”

STELLA. Oh, help! That doesn't sound a bit like me—but

never mind. Let's rehearse it, and I'll get it off pat. Now—*(Raises R. arm in air)*—"Honor!—I'm sorry—in a moment of un—" It's no use, the words will choke me. I'll never be able to get them out. *(Crosses down R.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM *(gently)*. For your husband's sake.

STELLA. Toddles! Yes, I must think hard of him. . . .
(Returns L. of her.) Here!—

(Re-enter SLOANE, who comes down R. of tea-table.)

—hold my hand. Let's try again—"Honor!—"

(STELLA turns, sees SLOANE, and rushes up to him before he can say a word.)

STELLA. Toddles—you darling! I'm sorry—I really am—I'm going to make amends—you'll see! *She's helping me.* 'Sh! *(Stopping him as he tries to speak.)* 'Sh! Not a word. We're going to rehearse—until we get it perfect. *(Dashing up to Mrs. CUNNINGHAM and dragging her by the arm.)* Come on, you dear. Now, once again. "Honor!—I'm sorry—"

(Exeunt quickly MRS. CUNNINGHAM and STELLA through arches U.B.R.)

(SLOANE stands staring after them, and goes R. of settee.)

(Enter HONOR! door U.L.)

HONOR!. Sloane!

(He turns unwillingly.)

SLOANE *(coldly)*. Well?

HONOR! *(R. of settee L.C., remorsefully)*. I'm so sorry—about just now. Believe me, I'm dreadfully sorry.

SLOANE. So you ought to be.

HONOR!. You think the fault was entirely on my side.

SLOANE. I don't say that. But you goaded poor Stella to madness—did it deliberately.

HONOR!. I'm sorry you should think that—and, honestly, I fail to see what I said or did that could have goaded to madness, as you put it, the most thin-skinned person in the world. The whole thing was a storm in, or rather, over, a tea-cup. *(Moving down slightly R. of tea-table.)*

SLOANE. There's nothing to be gained by arguing about the matter. I shall never forgive you for what you said to Stella *(Moves up.)*

HONOR! *(crossing to him)*. Sloane! Sloane! You don't mean that. . . . Don't you know that I would have cut out my tongue rather than say anything that'd hurt you?

SLOANE (*unmoved*). Anything that hurts my wife hurts me. . . . And now, if you'll excuse me—— (*He turns to go up.*)

HONORIA (*wildly*). Don't go like that, Sloane! I know that I ought not to have said what I did, but can't you see that I, too, was goaded to madness? Are you as blind as a bat, or don't you realize that if I hate Stella, it's because she married you?

(SLOANE *stares aghast.*)

SLOANE. Good God! You don't mean——?

HONORIA (*with unconvincing haste as she turns to face the audience*). No, of course I don't, I—I'm talking rubbish. I—please forget all about it.

(SLOANE *looks at her gravely.*)

Let's see, what did I come in about? Oh, I remember I wanted to thank you, thank you most awfully for the cheque.

(*Gradually she recovers her self-possession.*)

SLOANE. Oh, that's all right. I'm sorry you've had such rotten luck.

HONORIA. It's been simply ghastly, lately. . . . By the way, d'you know you made a mistake in the cheque?

SLOANE (*coming down*). Did I?

HONORIA. Yes. (*Handing cheque.*) Look—you wrote two-hundred and then put two-fifty in the figures.

SLOANE. Now, how the deuce did I come to do that?

HONORIA. It's my fault, probably.

SLOANE. You asked for two hundred, didn't you?

HONORIA. Yes, in the letter, but when I added things up again I found it wouldn't be enough, so I asked for another fifty in the postscript

SLOANE. Ah! Evidently that's how the mistake arose.

HONORIA. You don't mind, do you?

SLOANE. No! I'll put it right. (*He crosses to writing-table R., and sits.*)

HONORIA. Won't you have to make out another cheque?

SLOANE. No, it will be quite sufficient if I alter this and initial it.

HONORIA. It's awfully good of you; I appreciate it most awfully.

(HONORIA *moves over to the window.*)

(STELLA *enters from back arch U.R., rehearsing the speech to herself, arm extended. Coming down, she sees SLOANE, but does not observe*
HONORIA.)

(STELLA *tiptoes up to SLOANE to give him a surprise.*)

SLOANE (*holding out cheque*). There you are.

STELLA (*taking it*). For me ?

(HONORIA *turns round sharply*.)

SLOANE (*rises*). Hallo, dear !—I didn't know you were there. No, that's Honoria's. (*Moves down below table*.)

STELLA (U.R.C., *looking at cheque in amazement*). You've given Honoria £250, what for ?

SLOANE (R.). Does that matter, old thing ?

STELLA. Yes. I don't see why I shouldn't know.

HONORIA (*coming down to tea-table*). You needn't worry, my dear Stella. It covers no guilty secrets. It's only a loan.

SLOANE. Give the cheque to Honoria, dear—will you ?

STELLA (*obeying*). But why should you borrow from Toddles ? What d'you want the money for ?

SLOANE (*in gentle reproof*). Surely, dear, that's Honoria's business, and not ours.

STELLA (*moves C. To SLOANE*). Don't *you* know ?

SLOANE. Even if I do, dear, I've not got the right to tell other people about it.

STELLA. Not even me ?

SLOANE (*smiling at her*). Not even you—unless I have Honoria's permission.

STELLA (*flamingly jealous*). Honoria's permission !—to tell *me* anything. . . . Oh, very well, then *I'm* going to have a secret that I can't tell *you* without a man's permission. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander !

(SLOANE *laughs cheerfully*.)

SLOANE. Right-o, little woman ! That's a bargain !

HONORIA. You know this is rather embarrassing for me. (*Moves up*.) Perhaps I may be forgiven if I withdraw.

STELLA (*detaining her*). Wait a minute. You're Sloane's cousin, and you've got 250 out of him. I'm his wife, and I want a lot more than that. I want 1,000.

SLOANE (*staggered*). You want what ?

STELLA. A thousand pounds. Cool and clear ! and I want it at once, please.

SLOANE. Whatever for ?

STELLA. That's *my* secret that I can't tell *you* without a *man's* permission ! (*Crosses to tea-table*.)

HONORIA (*moving to staircase*). Oh, really ! I must ask to be excused. If this matter comes into the Courts, I don't want to be called in as a witness.

(*She goes off upstairs laughing*.)

STELLA (*grimacing after her*). Liar ! (*Moves to fire-place*.) She

knows she'd love to be called in, if she thought she could do anything to help you to be rid of me!

SLOANE (*crossing to tea-table above it*). 'Sh! 'Sh, darling! Don't talk nonsense. . . . Now, tell me, you don't really want all that money, do you?

STELLA. Yes, I do!

SLOANE. And you won't tell me why you want it?

STELLA (*returning to him—hesitating*). I will if—if you'll tell me why you lent that money to Honoria.

(SLOANE *turns away*.)

You won't? All right, then. I want £1,000 please, and I want it now.

SLOANE. Very well. You shall have it. (*Tenderly*.) I trust you—absolutely, little girl. I'll write to the bank at once, and have it placed to your credit.

STELLA. That's a promise?

SLOANE. It is. (*Taking both her hands*.) And now—won't you tell me?

STELLA (*pause*). No. (*Turning her head away*.)

SLOANE. Little girl, you're hurting me. I don't understand.

(*Enter ARCHIE, LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE and CARRUTHERS from the billiard-room I.R.E. They move behind settee to arch R.*)

ARCHIE. Come on! I tell you she's a corker—the quickest ever you'll see. (*Seeing STELLA and SLOANE, he comes C.*)

(CARRUTHERS and LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE remain U.R.)

Hallo, you two. Come out and have a squint at my new bus before it gets dark.

SLOANE. Not just now, Archie. I've a letter to write for Stella.

(*He gives her a last pleading glance, which she ignores, and then goes out 2.R.E.*)

ARCHIE. Well, you'll come, Stella, won't you?

STELLA. Take me out in it to-morrow, instead, Archie, I'm rather tired, and besides, I want to talk to Mr. Carruthers.

(CARRUTHERS looks at her in surprise, and bows immediate acquiescence. Comes down R.)

ARCHIE (*protesting*). Oh, I say, but he was coming too.

CARRUTHERS. You must excuse me, Archie.

ARCHIE (*going up to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). Then that only leaves the gov'nor. Come on, sir. (*Crossing front of him*.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*cheerfully as always*). Only leaves the

guv'nor, I like that. Oh, well, I may as well see what I shall be asked to pay for later. Come along.

(They go out through arch back R.)

CARRUTHERS *(coming C.)*. This is an unexpected privilege, dear Lady Sloane.

STELLA. Well, make the most of it. It's going to be short and sweet.

(She crosses to desk above settee R., and takes cheque-book from drawer, and writes cheque rapidly.)

CARRUTHERS. That it will be sweet goes without saying, but must it necessarily be short?

STELLA. It's a business interview—"business as usual," you know. You like prompt settlements, don't you?

CARRUTHERS *(studiously polite, but puzzled)*. I—I'm afraid I don't understand.

STELLA *(coming to him below settee)*. Read this, "Billy-doo," and you will. *(Gives cheque.)*

CARRUTHERS *(obeying)*. What's this? *(Astonished.)* Your cheque for a thousand pounds? . . . For me?

(She nods.)

I am overwhelmed by this—this token of appreciation, but upon my word, I—

STELLA. You told Archie he owed you £1,000. I'm sure he doesn't, but anyway, there's the money.

(CARRUTHERS looks at cheque again.)

Yes, it's dated three days ahead, but it'll be met all right—you needn't worry. *(Crosses L.)*

CARRUTHERS *(deprecatingly)*. Oh! Please!

STELLA *(L. of tea-table, returning)*. And let me tell you that this is the last time you'll settle Archie's debts for him. As a friend in need you work out too expensive.

CARRUTHERS *(with a laugh and a shrug)*. One must live, dear lady.

STELLA. But not with one's friends, and on one's friends at the same time. Oh, by the way, you're not to tell Archie that it's settled. I'll do that.

CARRUTHERS. Just as you please.

STELLA. And you're not to breathe a word to Sloane, or to anybody else.

CARRUTHERS. I give you my word.

STELLA. I'd rather you kept it.

CARRUTHERS *(crosses to tea-table)*. I'm afraid you think very badly of me, Lady Sloane. . . . After all—people are as God made them.

STELLA. Only some grow worse. That's why for the future you'll leave Archie alone, or I'll know the reason why. D'you get me?

CARRUTHERS (*admiringly*). Gad! You know how to stick up for your friends! Brown sugar, or white, I like you—I like you tremendously. . . . Here, take this thing back—I can wait. (*Moves in front of table as HONORIA appears on staircase R.C. unseen.*)

STELLA. Don't be a fool! Hang on to it. I expect you often keep your mouth shut for less than a thousand pounds.

CARRUTHERS. Not often. (*HONORIA cranes forward to listen.*)

STELLA. Go on! You needn't swank. (*Moving away.*)

CARRUTHERS (*laughing*). One moment—(*Taking out pocket-book and offering her some papers*)—haven't you forgotten something?

STELLA. What?

CARRUTHERS. These I.O.U.'s. (*STELLA snatches them.*)

STELLA. Gracious! You might have had me rather badly. . . . Now, let's make a bargain: If you keep your mouth shut, I'll keep mine. . . . (*She pauses—a stair creaks—STELLA turns quickly.*)

(*HONORIA comes down. STELLA seeing her, whispers sharply.*)

Cave!

(*CARRUTHERS turns.*)

HONORIA (*coming forward R.C. with a paper in her hand*). Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Carruthers.

CARRUTHERS. You're not disturbing me, dear lady. (*Moves up behind settee L.C.*)

STELLA (*crossing C. and up to stair. Contemptuously*). I've finished with him—you can have him. (*Turns abruptly.*) Oh, hellup! I clean forgot— (*Returning towards HONORIA.*)

HONORIA. Nothing more important than your manners, I hope.

STELLA (*resolutely*). Yes, my apology!—I promised—I mean. (*Sees CARRUTHERS watching her.*) You turn your back.

(*CARRUTHERS does so, but soon turns again. STELLA catches his eye, and he quickly turns his back a second time.*)

(*Holding up her arm as previously rehearsed.*) "Honoria! I'm sorry—"

HONORIA. Is this necessary? (*Turns her back on STELLA.*)

STELLA. Yes, it is. It's most important. It's no good you turning your back. You've got to hear it. (*Pulls her round.*) "Honoria, I'm sorry—I'm—I'm sorry you—you're—(*With a sudden burst*)—you're such a cat! There! I've done it!

(*Exit STELLA, tempestuously, upstairs.*)

(CARRUTHERS moves aside to hide his smile.)

HONORIA (R., raising her eyebrows and her shoulders—disdainfully). Poor Sloane!

CARRUTHERS (coming forward). D'you think so? I rather envy him—although she has just been talking to me for the good of my soul.

HONORIA. That's just what I've come to do! (Her voice hardens.) Have you seen this evening's paper? (Crosses to C.)

CARRUTHERS (L.C.). No. Any news?

HONORIA (R.C., handing the paper to him). "Retrenchment's" scratched!

CARRUTHERS (affecting the utmost perturbation). Good Lord! It isn't possible! (He searches the paper.) Phew! what a knock. (Moves slightly.)

HONORIA (following him slightly, her voice tremulous with indignation). A knock-out for me! You're supposed to know all about horses. Why did you advise me to back it?

CARRUTHERS (unruffled). I don't claim to be infallible. I advised you to the best of my ability.

HONORIA. Your ability for what? . . . (He glances at her.) I tell you, I've heard some strange stories about you. Unless you put me on to a winner next time, I'll—

CARRUTHERS (coldly). Well?

HONORIA. I'll—

CARRUTHERS (with a mocking bow to her). Write to John Bull about it. By all means. (He goes out through R.C. arch into outer hall.)

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE'S voice is heard off).

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE and MRS. CUNNINGHAM enter from U.L., LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE comes C., MRS. CUNNINGHAM L.C.—R. of tea-table.)

(HONORIA endeavours to appear unconcerned.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah, my dear. Have you seen Stella?

HONORIA. I have indeed! In fact, I've just witnessed a scene between her and Mr. Carruthers that has been an eye-opener, even to me. (Picks up magazine from settee R., and glances at it during the following scene.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (bewildered). A scene between Stella and Mr. Carruthers. . . . What do you mean, Honoria?

HONORIA. Did you know that Lady Sloane and Mr. Carruthers are old acquaintances?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Old acquaintances! Oh, surely not! If that were so, why should they pretend to meet as strangers?

HONORIA. That's only one of the many things that will require explanation.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. If what Lady Honoria says is correct—I'm sure the explanation will be very simple.

HONORIA. In that case, our dear Stella will find it equally simple to explain why she should give Mr. Carruthers a cheque for £1,000.

(Having dropped her bombshell, she stands, smilingly, watching its effect, and notes with particular delight that, for the moment, even MRS. CUNNINGHAM'S confidence is shaken.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(aghast and incredulous)*. A thousand pounds! Stella has given Mr. Carruthers a thousand pounds.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM *(smiling it away)*. It does sound rather an incredulous amount.

HONORIA. She'd not the least idea that I was there. I was half-way down the stairs before she saw me. I didn't intend to be an eavesdropper, but I couldn't help myself.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. But even if you saw her give Mr. Carruthers a cheque, how d'you know what the amount was?

HONORIA. Her exact words were: "I expect you often keep your mouth shut for less than a thousand pounds."

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM comes to chair L.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(crushed)*. A thousand pounds to keep his mouth shut! . . . Oh, my poor, poor Sloane! *(Sits on settee L.C.)*

(HONORIA goes to chair R. and sits.)

(Enter ARCHIE and LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE back R., talking together.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Nothing doing, my boy. I'm not risking my neck, if you are.

(They are making for the billiard-room when LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE checks her husband as he is top of settee.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Edward, I want you a minute.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Eh, what is it, my dear?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Close the door behind you, Archie.

ARCHIE *(behind settee)*. Oh, I'm to clear off, am I? Right-o. *(He goes out down R.)*

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Edward, I've just had a most dreadful shock. Honoria has told me something—something very painful.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(testily)*. What the deuce did you want to do that for, Honoria?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. She was in duty bound to. You must be told, too.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Now, if it's anything unpleasant, I—I'd rather keep out of it.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You *can't* keep out of it. It concerns us all too closely. I'm grieved to have to tell you that Stella has some dreadful secret—she has just paid Mr. Carruthers £1,000 to keep it quiet.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*furious at the suggestion*). What!!! Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*as if her husband were a hopeless case*). Tell your uncle what you told me, Honoria. (*Returns to settee R.C.*)

HONORIA. I'm sorry to say I saw her do it, uncle.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*irritably*). Then you shouldn't have looked. . . . How do you know it was £1,000 she gave him?

HONORIA. I heard her say so.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*as before*). Then you shouldn't have listened! Where did she get the money?

HONORIA. I happen to know Sloane gave it to her.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. H'm! You're a walking encyclopædia, Honoria. . . . But that settles the matter. If Sloane gave her the money, obviously it was hers to do as she liked with. What she did with it is no business of ours. (*Sits settee R., well pleased with the verdict he has just delivered.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I don't agree with you, Edward. We must *make* it our business. A secret that costs £1,000 to be kept quiet must surely be a very shocking one.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*standing L.*). Forgive me, Lady Knightsbridge, but I'm quite sure there's a mistake somewhere. Stella has nothing whatever in common with Mr. Carruthers. Indeed, she has several times expressed to me her dislike of him. I'm bound to say her opinion coincided with what I've always thought myself of him.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You've met him before, then?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. I've *heard* of him from my sporting friends;—every one there knows Crobie Carruthers—"Six to four Carrie" is what he's generally called.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*rises, and comes C.*). "Six to four Carrie." What on earth does that mean?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. It means that the odds are always six to four on *him*!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I'm afraid that I don't follow.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Well, we all know how Mr. Carruthers lives, don't we? (*Sits chair L.*)

HONORIA (*uneasily*). I fail to see what scandal about Mr. Carruthers has to do with what we're talking about.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*at HONORIA*). Scandal is necessary sometimes to defeat scandal. . . . (*Turning again to MRS. CUNNINGHAM.*) How does he live?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Well, it's generally reputed that he pays his own debts by buying up other people's—at bargain prices.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*sits on settee L.C., feeling that things are*

going beyond her comprehension). What an involved and complicated occupation! But this only makes matters worse. He's been buying up Stella's debts.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. But, dear Lady Knightsbridge, I'm sure Stella hasn't got any.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Then what else can it be—unless it's hush-money.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. T'sh! t'sh! my dear! Don't go so fast. . . .

(He breaks off abruptly on observing the entrance of SLOANE from 2.R.E., grave and dejected in appearance, going towards U.R.C. LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves U.L.C.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(rises)*. Sloane, dear, can you spare me a moment?

SLOANE *(turns)*. What is it, mother? *(Coming c.)*

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. I've something very serious to tell you—something very serious indeed.

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE walks to window and looks out.)

SLOANE. Well?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. It's to do with Stella. . . . Your father and I have found out, accidentally—*(Deprecatory noises from LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE)*—that she has just given a cheque for a thousand pounds—

(SLOANE starts.)

—to some one in this house.

(SLOANE makes no comment.)

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE proceeds.)

Why she gave it—we don't precisely know yet, but——

SLOANE *(coldly)*. Is there any reason why you should?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah! *My* point exactly! *(Comes down L. corner settee.)*

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Then you see nothing unusual in her giving it to Mr. Carruthers?

SLOANE *(taken aback completely)*. Carruthers?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. In exchange for a promise that he will keep his mouth shut.

SLOANE *(violently)*. What the devil does this mean? Who's been spreading these lying tales about my wife? *(Moves slightly down R.)*

(STELLA'S voice is heard off calling.)

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM rises as STELLA appears in archway R.C.—a sealed envelope in her hand.)

STELLA (*coming down c.*). Saunders! Saunders! Where's Mr. Archie? Oh! I was looking for Archie. (*Noticing their grave looks.*) Why, what's the matter? You all look very solemn. Toddles!

(SLOANE compresses his lips and makes no response.)

Mrs. Cunningham! (*She goes to her like a child.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*holding out her hands to her*). Stella, dear, I think Lady Knightsbridge wants to ask you a question.

SLOANE (*sternly*). I forbid it! I will ask my wife the question, and I know she will answer me truthfully.

STELLA (*crosses R. to SLOANE*). Toddles! What's the matter? What have I done now? Don't look so stern.

SLOANE (*more gently*). Darling, you know that money you asked me for this afternoon—what have you done with it?

STELLA (*reproachfully*). I told you it was a secret, Toddles, why I wanted it. You agreed it should be.

SLOANE. I know, dear, but there are reasons why it can't remain a secret any longer. . . . Now, come along, old girl, tell me—what have you done with it?

STELLA (*desperately*). I can't.

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM *moves up, and* LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *moves below the tea-table.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah!

SLOANE (*gravely*). You must, Stella. Somebody—(*He glances at HONORIA*)—has been trying to make mischief. It's been said that you paid the cheque over to—to a certain person in this house as hush-money.

STELLA (*unable to contain herself any longer*). That's a lie—but I know who said it.

(*She stands over HONORIA, fists clenched, eyes flashing.*)

You miserable sneak, you!—and after what you've got out of Sloane yourself! If only for decency's sake, you might have kept your tongue still.

HONORIA. Didn't you say "I expect you often keep your mouth shut for less than a thousand pounds?"

STELLA. Well, supposing I did? (*Moves up c. slightly.*)

SLOANE. Surely, darling, you must see that it requires explanation.

STELLA. It wouldn't if you trusted me. But you don't.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*moves towards her*). Come, come, little girl, that's nonsense. We do, but you must realize—

STELLA. I do! I realize that you're all against me—the whole lot of you! You *want* to believe ill of me. Very well, you shall.

SLOANE (*protesting*). Dearest, you know I—

STELLA (*rounding on him*). Do I? Then why did you allow this

inquisition? . . . Not even *you* trust me, Toddles—you—you . . . and you're—and you're quite right not to! (*Down to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE; then getting hysterical.*) I'll never tell you, never, why I paid that money to Carruthers. I'll leave you to guess! But I swear it's worse—much worse—than anything you can imagine! I've done dreadful things—unmentionable things—things that ought to make me scarlet with shame!

SLOANE (*appealingly*). Stella, darling!

STELLA. Darling, be damned! What do you care for me, so long as you avoid a scandal in the family? (*Moves up by settee.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*trying to restrain her*). Child——!

STELLA. But you're not going to avoid it. You're going to get it, good and plenty! (*To SLOANE, who moves up.*) I'll never tell you why I paid that money, but *you'll find out!* Ha! Ha! Keep your eye on the Sunday papers! (*Hysterically.*) Ha! ha! ha!

(*ARCHIE enters by door D.R., stands behind settee watching STELLA.*)

Yes, *you'll find out!*—and then you'll get the shock of your young lives!

(*STELLA turns to go, and SLOANE endeavours to restrain her.*)

SLOANE (*pleadingly*). Stella!

STELLA. Oh, go to hell!

(*MRS. CUNNINGHAM moves up to the window.*)

(*STELLA thrusts SLOANE aside, flings down the letter that she has been holding, and dashes out to the hall, colliding with CARRUTHERS, who is just entering.*)

(*ARCHIE stares after her agape.*)

(*SLOANE picks up the letter.*)

ARCHIE. Good Lord! I say! What's the matter with Stella?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Leave us, Archie, please.

ARCHIE. What on earth for?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Go, my boy. (*Goes up L.*)

ARCHIE. Why?

SLOANE. Clear out, Archie. Oh, this is addressed to you—take it—and clear out.

ARCHIE (*going to door*). Well, I'm blowed! You're a nice cheery crowd—I don't think! (*He goes out I.R.E.*)

(*LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves up stage.*)

(*CARRUTHERS comes down C.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (L.C.). Mr. Carruthers?

CARRUTHERS (C.). Yes, dear lady?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You have been our guest here for some time.

CARRUTHERS (*with a glance at SLOANE, who is by settee*). Have I outstayed my welcome?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. If we put a few questions to you will you be good enough to answer them?

CARRUTHERS (*surprised, but still polite*). To the best of my ability.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. My daughter-in-law gave you a cheque for a thousand pounds this afternoon.

(CARRUTHERS *starts, embarrassed.*)

She's admitted that she has. Will you tell me *why* she gave you that large sum?

(CARRUTHERS *catches SLOANE's eye.*)

CARRUTHERS. I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to tell you—without Lady Sloane's permission.

SLOANE. Please leave it at that, mother.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. But, Sloane—

SLOANE. My wife does not wish the reason for her payment of this cheque to be made public. That is enough.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. It is *not* enough. For the sake of the family name we must get to the bottom of this.

SLOANE. Then I shall not remain. (*He turns to go.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming to him—detaining him*). Better stay, Sloane.

(SLOANE *remains reluctantly.*)

CARRUTHERS. Perhaps there is just one thing I could mention without betraying a confidence.

(MRS. CUNNINGHAM *comes down from the fire-place.*)

What exactly are your suspicions about this money? . . . Do you imagine that Lady Sloane owed it to me?—or that she gave it me to bury some indiscretion of her past?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Hanged if I believe either!

SLOANE (*gratefully*). Thank you, father.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*in the dark*). We don't know what to believe, Mr. Carruthers. We look to you for enlightenment.

CARRUTHERS. I gave Lady Sloane my word of honour that I would not tell anybody of our little transaction. But in the circumstances I feel compelled to modify it—at any rate, in part. Lady Sloane's reason for giving me her cheque did not concern her personally in any way. She paid me the money to help a friend in trouble.

(*This statement is received in characteristic fashion by each member of his audience.*)

SLOANE. Thank you, Carruthers.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *moves to chair L. of tea-table.* CARRUTHERS *bows and sits settee L.C.*)

HONORIA (*rising*). Surely, Sloane, you're not going to believe that story?

(*Movement to c. by LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

SLOANE (*turns*). Yes, by Heavens, I am!—and so are you! What's more, you're going down on your knees to beg Stella's pardon for your miserable suspicions.

HONORIA (*in her most annoying tone*). Oh, am I?

SLOANE. Yes, you are. Ever since we came down to Dewhurst you have made it hell for Stella, *and* for me! You, too, mother. Now, until you've both apologized to her and she's forgiven you, we shall not meet again.

(*Exit SLOANE through arch back R.* LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *subsides.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming to tea-table*). Well, my dear, you've brought it on yourself. From the first both you and Honoria have treated that poor little girl abominably—yes, abominably. (*At HONORIA.*)

(HONORIA, *with an exclamation of exasperation, goes out of door down R.*)

I always told you she was a nice girl, but you never listen to what I say.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *holds up her hand in protest.*)

You'd better rely upon me a bit more for the future. The breeches don't suit you, Emily. You're not the build for them. Leave 'em to those better endowed by Nature to wear 'em. (*Turns away with a self-satisfied smile, and goes up stage.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. But, Mrs. Cunningham!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM (*coming to top of tea-table*). I think Lady Sloane has made us all heartily ashamed of ourselves!

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *gasps.*)

CARRUTHERS (*rising*). Mrs. Cunningham is right. I fear we've all underrated her very sadly, dear lady.

(*Re-enter SLOANE hastily, with opened letter, hat and coat—distractedly.*
He comes down c.)

SLOANE. Father, Mother, it's too awful—Stella—she's gone!
OMNES. Gone!

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *rises.* LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *comes down by fire-place.*)

SLOANE. Yes, borrowed Archie's new car and gone off to London, alone. She merely says—send her things to Horridge's.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. Oh! Poor child!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*crossing to SLOANE*). You must bring her back, Sloane. Avoid scandal at all costs.

SLOANE (*irritably—passing LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE over to his R.*) Yes, of course. Another car will be round in a moment. (*Moves up to top of settee R.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. You must go too, Edward; remember, no scandal whatever happens.

(*Enter ARCHIE excitedly, holding IOU's in his hand, and going behind settee R. to SLOANE.*)

ARCHIE. I say, Sloane, Honoria has just told me about the row—I know all about it now—and I——

SLOANE (*brushing him aside*). Yes, yes. Another time, old chap.

(*Exit SLOANE through arch U.R.*)

ARCHIE (*who has been staring in amazement*). I say, mother—— (*Coming forward.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*waving him aside, and going L. of him*). Don't bother me now, my boy.

(*Exit LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, upstairs.*)

ARCHIE. Mrs. Cunningham!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM. You must excuse me, Mr. Wentworth. (*Goes R. of ARCHIE.*) Lady Knightsbridge wants me.

(*Exit MRS. CUNNINGHAM hurriedly, upstairs.*)

ARCHIE. I say, father——!

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*brushing him aside*). For goodness' sake don't bother me. Can't you see I'm busy? (*He pushes him aside, and goes L. of him.*)

(*Exit LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, upstairs.*)

ARCHIE (*gazing blankly after them*). Well, of all the—— (*Turns to CARRUTHERS.*) Look here, Carrie, I was going—— (*Comes down R.C.*)

CARRUTHERS (*who has moved down L.C.*). No good telling me, Archie, I know all about it already.

ARCHIE (*utterly dumbfounded*). Well, I'll be sugared!

CARRUTHERS (*taking out his cigarette-case and taking a cigarette*). That's what everybody seems to be—(*Tapping cigarette*)—Brown Sugared!

(*QUICK CURTAIN.*)

ACT III

The SCENE is the Manager's private office at the Palladrome Theatre, London. It is the evening of the same day, and the curtains are drawn over the window R. In the centre of the L. wall is a fire-place, in which an electric stove is alight, and in front of this is a large writing-table littered with papers. L. of the table is the Manager's swivel arm-chair, and R. of it a large arm-chair for visitors. Both above the fire-place and on the back wall are bookcases. In the up stage R. corner of the room stands a piano, on the back of which is appended a D.C. Theatre Bill announcing the appearance of Ninon de Vaux in the new edition of "All the Heavenly Bodies." There are two doors, one on the L. of the back wall, and the other on the lower side of the R. wall. Between this door and the window is a typist's table with a chair before it. The office has numerous framed photographs of theatrical celebrities and scenes from plays pasted on the walls, whilst several loose photographs are on the mantelshelf and on a large gilt mirror above the fire-place.

As the curtain rises, MR. EDMONDSON's secretary, MISS GIBSON, a small, frail, overworked looking woman, is discovered seated at the table R. busily typing.

Enter immediately from the back L., EDMONDSON, the Manager. He is hot, excited, and irritable, and he comes down to chair L. of table, and glances rapidly at his letters which lie before him, whilst the Secretary continues at her work.

EDMONDSON (*testily*). Oh, for goodness' sake stop that beastly tapping! What news?

MISS GIBSON (*sitting R.*). There's a telegram from Mr. Archbutt, sir. It came over the 'phone. I was just typing it out.

EDMONDSON. Well, what's he say?

(MISS GIBSON *slips the paper from the machine, and reads.*)

MISS GIBSON (*coming over to EDMONDSON at desk*). "Have ascertained two passengers left Euston this afternoon for Killarney, name of Hart."

EDMONDSON (*rises*). Then that settles it! She *has* gone with him, and left us in the cart! . . . My God! What's to be done now? This show's played out. We've got to open with the new



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edition on Monday, or we close down. Who the devil can we get to take her place? Haven't you got somebody to suggest, eh?

MISS GIBSON (*tentatively*). There's a copy of Thursday's *Telegraph* here, sir. (*Goes up R., and gets the paper from off the piano.*) Perhaps if you looked at the list of actresses who are disengaged. . . .

EDMONDSON (*rises*). Don't be a fool, woman! I tell you I must have a star—a big star! Ninon de Vaux was a sure draw. I banked on her. I knew she'd done the dirty on Barlow, but I thought that had taught her a lesson. I never dreamed she'd be up to her tricks again. And to have chucked up a chance like I was giving her for the sake of a miserable worm like Freddie Hart, who hasn't got a bean to his name!—damned if I understand you women! . . . Well, that finishes Ninon. She'll never get a shop in a West End Theatre again if I know anything about it.

(*The buzzer goes on the desk.*)

(*To MISS GIBSON.*) See who it is.

MISS GIBSON (*speaking into the telephone on the desk*). Yes, Mr. Edmondson's just back. I'll tell him. . . . Mr. Snelling, sir.

EDMONDSON. Oh! (*Takes receiver from her.*) That you, Snelling? . . . Yes, come up at once. . . . Any luck?

(*The answer is evidently in the negative, for EDMONDSON gives an exclamation of annoyance and replaces the receiver.*)

MISS GIBSON (*who has moved back c.*). What about Miss Ethel Creevey, sir?

EDMONDSON (*sits L. of desk—shortly*). Tied up to Grossmith and Laurillard. Rehearsing now for their next show.

MISS GIBSON. There's Cicely Freebody. She made a big hit—if you remember—in "The Rag Bag."

EDMONDSON. De Courville's got her. He's starring her in Paris. . . . Heaven's above woman!—what's the use of having a secretary who doesn't know what's going on in the theatre? (*Gets cigar from mantelpiece.*) I seem to be surrounded by the most incompetent lot of—

(*Tap on door interrupts him.*)

Come in!

(*Enter SNELLING, the assistant manager, up L.C. He comes to C., R. of the table.*)

SNELLING. Is it true, sir, that she's really gone?

(*EDMONDSON hands him copy of telegram.*)

EDMONDSON. Looks like it, doesn't it?

SNELLING. Well, all I've got to say, sir—it's a dashed dirty trick!

EDMONDSON. You show remarkable restraint, Snelling. . . . Seen Daisy May?

SNELLING. Yes, sir.

EDMONDSON. Well?

SNELLING. She wants ten weeks' guarantee, a hundred a week, and a percentage of the profits.

EDMONDSON. Is that all?

SNELLING. Won't consider anything less, sir.

EDMONDSON. Then tell her she can go to—Butt! (*Turns away to the fire-place.*)

SNELLING. But what, sir?

EDMONDSON. Just Butt. The amazing vanity of these jumped-up chorus girls! It's—it's positively incredible! . . . Well, that leaves us where we were. Now, then, who d'you suggest?

SNELLING. Everybody seems to be engaged, sir. . . . Couldn't we——? (*He hesitates.*)

EDMONDSON. Well?

SNELLING. Have the show altered so as to make Miss Levasseur's the leading part. She's a jolly good little actress, and the public like her.

EDMONDSON. But—Good God! man!—she's got no sense of humour, and—(*Fingering a pile of music M.S.*)—here we've got the best stuff Darewski's ever turned out. . . . Can't you hear Miss Levasseur trying to sing "I don't mean what you mean?" My God! It wouldn't mean what either of 'em meant. And as for her dancing—I'd sooner engage Lockhart's Elephants.

SNELLING. The understudy's pretty good, sir—and she can dance. (*He puts the tips of his fingers to his lips, and blows a kiss into the air.*) It's a treat to watch her.

EDMONDSON (*dangerously calm*). And do you suppose that the public would stand for an understudy when they've paid good money to see Ninon de Vaux? (*Going round back of table to him.*) What the deuce do you think you're here for, Snelling? Do you think I want the place made into a picture palace like the rest? Do you think I pay you a salary to make a damn fool suggestion like that?

SNELLING (*backing away*). I'm very sorry, sir—but, in the circumstances——

EDMONDSON (*cutting him short*). Phaw! (*Crosses to fire-place below table.*)

(*The desk telephone rings again, and MISS GIBSON crosses over to attend to it.*)

I can't see anybody. Tell 'em I mustn't be interrupted for the next two hours.

MISS GIBSON (*comes over to 'phone*). Yes, Mr. Edmond. . . . What! . . . Oh! . . . Hold on a minute. It's the stage door, sir.

There's a Lady Sloane wants to know if she can see you. (*Crosses R., having put receiver back.*)

EDMONDSON (*thinking*). Lady Sloane! Lady Sloane!

SNELLING (*coming forward—excitedly*). Why, that's little Stella Deering—that was! Used to be in the chorus of "The Daffodil Girl." You remember, sir!

EDMONDSON. By Jove! yes—of course—but didn't I read somewhere in the papers about a large house-party to be given at Dewhurst in her honour? Isn't that on now?

MISS GIBSON (*crossing to door R.*). It starts to-morrow. There was all about it in the *Daily Mirror* this morning.

(*She takes the "Mirror" from her mackintosh pocket, crosses to the desk with it, and points out the photograph to Edmondson, who moves up to see it.*)

Here's a picture of her, sir, taken with her husband and her little dog. That's the husband with the hat on. I kept it because he's so like a young man that once——

EDMONDSON. I see, I see. (*Hastily taking paper.*) Thank you, Miss Gibson. Yes. (*He glances hurriedly at news column.*) But, if this Dewhurst show starts to-morrow, what the deuce——? (*Crosses R.*)

SNELLING. That's just what I was thinking, sir.

EDMONDSON. Anything else?

SNELLING (*diffidently*). Well, sir, we know these earl and girl affairs don't always turn out as well as they might, and if there was any chance of getting little Stella back to the theatre, why——

EDMONDSON. If!—If!—If! By God, yes! That'd be some stunt! We'd have the laugh over Miss Ninon de Vaux then! But, of course, there isn't—not an earthly. Luck like that doesn't come anybody's way—except Cochrane's. (*Crosses L.*) All the same, I may as well see her. No harm in that. Go and fetch her up through the front, Snelling.

SNELLING. Right-o, sir.

(*Goes out door back L. The buzzer on the desk starts violently. Miss GIBSON hastens to the telephone.*)

MISS GIBSON (*at 'phone*). Yes. Mr. Edmondson will see Lady Sloane. Mr. Snelling's just gone down to show her the way up. Do you wish me to stay, sir?

EDMONDSON. No, wait in the outer office. If I want you, I'll give you a ring.

MISS GIBSON. Very good, sir.

(*She gathers up her papers from the typewriting table and goes out.*)

(*EDMONDSON paces the floor thoughtfully, till SNELLING opens the door back L., and ushers in STELLA.*)

SNELLING. Lady Sloane, sir.

(EDMONDSON moves forward to greet her C. with hands outstretched in welcome.)

EDMONDSON. Ah! Come in, Lady Sloane, come in! How very, very charming of you to look up your old friends immediately on your return to London. Why, you can't have been back more than a few hours. I gathered from this morning's paper that you were at Dewhurst yesterday.

STELLA. I was at Dewhurst this morning.

EDMONDSON (R.). Ah, well, come along, sit down—in the chair that we reserve for our stars. (*He pulls forward the arm-chair and places it in position beside his desk and R. of it.*)

SNELLING (*up L.*). I shall be in the box office, if you want me, sir.

EDMONDSON. Right, Mr. Snelling. Thanks. (*Goes R.C.*)

(SNELLING goes out door back L.)

STELLA (*sitting*). Well, how are you, Mr. Edmondson? Quite well? (*Takes off her gloves and puts them on the table.*)

EDMONDSON (R.). So—so, my dear. (*Moves to her.*) Over-worked as usual, and a little worried. (*He crosses over L. above table to lower L. end of it.*) But never mind about me. I want to hear about you, and the great times that you've been having since your marriage. Let's see—how long is it?

STELLA. Nearly four months.

EDMONDSON. Four months? Ah! Then, of course, you're still in the seventh heaven.

(*He takes a cigar from the box on the mantel-piece. There is a pause, and he, with his back to STELLA, watches her in the looking-glass. He gives a little laugh, and repeats his remark as he lights the cigar.*)

I say, you're still in the seventh heaven.

STELLA. I'm a frost, Mr. Edmondson.

EDMONDSON. Eh?

STELLA. A dead frost.

EDMONDSON. Surely you don't mean——?

STELLA. I've cut the painter. I've run away from Dewhurst.

EDMONDSON (*sits L. of desk*). You! But the house-party that I've just been reading about—(*He indicates the "Daily Mirror" as the source of his information*)—the house-party that's to gather to-morrow in your honour? The dog——

STELLA. Oh, the house-party'll be there all right, *and* the dog, but I shan't. I've scratched the date.

EDMONDSON. Good heavens! I—I'm awfully sorry to learn this. I'd no idea of it. I always thought that Lord Sloane was—
er——

STELLA. It's nothing to do with Toddles.

EDMONDSON. I'll never believe that *you*——!

STELLA. It isn't my fault either, really. It's just damned bad luck. It's—it's his people.

EDMONDSON. Oh!

STELLA. His mother didn't cotton to me from the start. I tried to make her like me, but it was no use. Every day I put my foot into it with her. This afternoon there was a hell of a bust-up, and I—I just cleared out. (*Rises and moves R.*)

EDMONDSON. And your husband let you go?

STELLA (*moves back C.*). I didn't give him a chance to stop me. . . . Mr. Edmondson, if he and I aren't going to—to crash, we've got to get away from Dewhurst. That's why I've come to you.

EDMONDSON. My dear little lady, if there's anything that I can do to help you, you know I'll do it gladly. But what can I do?

STELLA. Let me come back to the theatre.

EDMONDSON (*concealing his elation beneath an air of extreme surprise*). Phew! (*Rises, crosses R.*)

STELLA (*rising, crosses C.*). Only it must be the front row of the chorus this time. I won't have his nasty catty cousin sneering at me again because I'm only in the second.

EDMONDSON. But, my dear Lady Sloane——

STELLA. Oh, chuck the Lady Sloane. You always used to call me Stella. I prefer it.

EDMONDSON. That's very sweet of you.

STELLA. Well, will you do it?

EDMONDSON. Well, sit down,

(*She resumes her seat.*)

and we'll talk about it. (*Crosses L.*). Now! (*Sits L. of table.*) What's the idea?

STELLA. I want to get Toddles away from his people. I want to have him all for my very own. If I came back to the stage, they'll cut me out. *He* won't. (*Facing the audience, and almost oblivious to his presence.*) The happiest days I've ever known were when we were first engaged, when I was playing here, and he used to come every night to see me. I want to get back to those days. I don't care a hang about being Lady Sloane; I just want to be Toddles' sweetheart, like I used to be. I'm *going* to get back to those days. (*Turning to EDMONDSON.*) But, it *must* be the front row. That's understood.

EDMONDSON. Front row be blowed! What do you say to a part?

STELLA. What? A part? (*She rises, and leans eagerly on desk.*)

EDMONDSON. A lead.

STELLA. A lead! Jiminy! (*Moves away R.*)

EDMONDSON (*lying—glibly*). You know, little girl, I *always* believed in you. You've a good presence, a nice little voice, and you can dance. Now, look here, I'll tell you what I'm prepared to do ; give me a three years' contract and I'll *star* you.

STELLA (*incredulously, coming back to the desk*). Star me !—me !

EDMONDSON. You know that I believe in being quite open. Very well, I'll put all my cards on the table. . . .

(STELLA *sits R. of desk.*)

You remember your friend, Ninon de Vaux ?

STELLA. Of course. She's going to be the big noise in your next edition, isn't she ?

EDMONDSON. She *was* going to be.

STELLA. Was ?

EDMONDSON. But she changed her mind at the last moment. She's left us in the lurch, and bolted to Killarney with a gentleman friend.

STELLA. What—again ?

EDMONDSON (*dryly*). Yes ! She seems to regard the stage as a—subsidiary profession.

STELLA. I call that too bad of her.

EDMONDSON. I call it—well, never mind what I call it ! The point is, Darewski's written her some top-hole songs—real winners. And here are a new set of verses Warlock's sent me for "I don't mean what you mean." What d'you think of 'em. (*Hands STELLA the verses.*)

STELLA (*she rises and reads them*). They look promising.

EDMONDSON. Like to try 'em over ?

STELLA (*eagerly*). D'you mean you'd—you'd give me a chance of singing it ?

EDMONDSON. You shall sing all Ninon's songs if you can manage 'em.

STELLA (*very enthusiastically*). Oh, you dear ?

EDMONDSON (*presses the button of the desk telephone*). Do you know Van Tromp—he's our Musical Director—we'll get him to come and play the accompaniment for you. . . . And now we must fix up about the contract. (*Sits.*)

(*Enter MISS GIBSON, who goes to her desk for envelopes.*)

(STELLA *moves up stage, and glances at the verses.*)

Ah ! Miss Gibson, bring a couple of our contract forms—artists, not authors.

MISS GIBSON (*looking curiously at STELLA*). Yes, sir. We're out of authors.

(MISS GIBSON *goes out R.* EDMONDSON *moves the pointer of the*

dial on his desk telephone and presses another button. He holds receiver to his ear.)

EDMONDSON. That you, Snelling? Is Van Tromp at liberty? Never mind. Ask him to send up the pianist for a few minutes. I want to try some one over in "I don't mean what you mean." Right! *(He replaces the receiver, and turns again to STELLA.)*

EDMONDSON. And now, my dear, what about terms?

STELLA *(U.R.C.—hesitatingly)*. Well, you—you were giving me four when I was here before.

EDMONDSON. And you think I ought to make it a bit more now, eh? Well, so I will. What do you say to—er—*(Rubs his chin as he regards her closely)*—twenty as a start?

STELLA *(amazed by what appears to her his generosity)*. Twenty pounds a week?

EDMONDSON. For a year. I shall want an option to renew it at—er—say thirty pounds the second year, and fifty the third.

STELLA *(agape)*. You really think that I'd be worth all that?

EDMONDSON. That remains to be seen; but I'm prepared to gamble on it.

(Miss GIBSON returns with contract forms, which she takes to the desk.)

Ah! Excuse me a moment, Lady—er—ahem!—STELLA!

(EDMONDSON pencils some notes upon contract.)

STELLA. Of course. *(Moves up R., sees poster on back of piano.)* Poor old Ninon! "The Singer with the Sunshine Soul." *(She makes two unsuccessful attempts to say these words, and gets it right the third time.)* That's a tongue twister. I'm afraid they won't say that of me.

EDMONDSON. I think that ought to be quite clear, Miss Gibson. . . . I've just added a short clause there—*(Pointing to contract)*—that I want you to type in. Two copies, please.

MISS GIBSON. Very good, sir. *(Crossing R.)*

EDMONDSON. Better do it on the other machine. I shall be busy here.

(STELLA takes off her hat and coat and places them on chair U.L.)

MISS GIBSON *(at door R.)*. Here's the pianist, sir. Shall I ask him to come in?

EDMONDSON. Come in. Come in, Mr.—er—— *(Rising, crosses R.)*

(PIANIST enters R.)

Just play over, "I don't mean what you mean" for Miss—er—Lady Sloane.

(The PIANIST moves to piano U.R.)

Now then, my dear—now, don't look so nervous. Just talk it through the music. The public won't expect much voice from a Viscountess. (*Sits R.*)

STELLA (*sings*).

Quite an innocent remark
Is sometimes called in question;
People think they see a dark
And rather rude suggestion.
If you've heard me once or twice
Say something not quite nice.

Refrain—

I don't mean what you mean,
You take hold of every word I say.
I don't mean what you mean,
You twist them round in quite another way.
I don't mean what you mean,
Such meanings I could never find.
If I show a man how well my garden grows,
And ask him if he'd like to see my nice new hose,
I don't mean what you mean,
My word! You've got a naughty mind!

Once in Town I chanced to meet
A soldier man when dancing.
He declared that I was sweet,
He vowed my frock entrancing.
Then he said he hoped to see
A great deal more of me.

.....never find.
If I say it really will be nice to see
Our Guardsmen in their "Bear-skins" like they used to be,
Etc., etc.

Once the curate called to say
A word or two of greeting.
Then he asked the shortest way
To reach the mothers' meeting.
I said that I'd always thought
The "bridle" path was short!

.....never find.
If I say an invalid is getting worse,
He's in bed with the doctor and he wants a nurse,
Etc., etc.,

If I say a friend of mine has had a loss,
He's somehow gone and left his bags at Charing Cross.

Once in Town I chanced to meet
A soldier man when dancing.
He declared that I was sweet
He vowed my frock entrancing.
When a kiss he tried to sneak
I said I liked his cheek.

If I say a short frock always pleases men,
So girls won't want to wear them any longer then.

If I meet a boy who wants to marry me,
And tell him that he ought to ask me on his knee,
I don't mean what you mean.....

[*A selection of one or more of these verses may be made.*]

EDMONDSON. Bravo! Bravo! Now the little dance.

(*She dances.*)

That'll knock 'em! (*Crosses L.*) Excellent! We'll run it through to-morrow at eleven. (*To PIANIST.*) Tell Van Tromp I'll want him with the orchestra to-morrow at eleven. Good night.

(*Exit PIANIST.*)

(*MISS GIBSON returns with contract, which she places upon EDMONSON'S desk, and stands awaiting further orders. The dance over, STELLA leans on chair above table.*)

EDMONDSON (*goes back to desk, and sits*). Ah! Thank you.

(*He glances through a copy of the contract.*)

That seems to be quite in order. Like to look at it—er—Stella?

(*STELLA leans on the table and looks over the contract roughly.*)

There are only two things of real importance—Clause 17—that does away with the usual fortnight's notice, and Clause 12, providing for your salary.

(*Telephone rings.*)

Will you attend to that, Miss Gibson?

(*MISS GIBSON answers it, sitting R. of table.*)

Now then, my dear, is that all right?

STELLA (*excitedly*). It's wonderfully all right. Here, give me a pen. Now where do I put my name?

(*He points out the position.*)

There? Right-o! (*She signs.*) Now then, it's done. For better or for worse—like that other contract I signed four months ago.

MISS GIBSON (*at 'phone*). Hallo . . . stage door. Yes, she's here. . . . I'll tell him. . . . Thank you. (*Rises.*) It's Lord Sloane, sir—asking for Lady Sloane.

STELLA (*at top of table—joyfully*). Toddles! Oh! so he *has* come after me.

(*MISS GIBSON crosses R. and sits at typing table.*)

EDMONDSON (*rises—dryly*). Evidently. How did he know that you were here?

STELLA (*ingenuously*). Well, I thought it better to leave word at the hotel where I was going, in case of—er—emergency.

EDMONDSON. And the emergency has arisen. Good thing it didn't come five minutes earlier!

STELLA. Why?

EDMONDSON. Well—— (*Indicates the contract.*)

STELLA. What! Do you think Toddles would have tried to stop me from taking out a policy to ensure our happiness. Why, he'll be ever so pleased with me. He'll say he'd no idea I was such a clever little woman. (*Coming round to chair R. of desk and sitting in it.*)

(*There is a tap upon the door R., and without waiting permission to enter, SLOANE opens it, and pops his head into the room.*)

SLOANE. May I come in?

(*He enters with his coat and hat on his arm.*)

EDMONDSON (*sharply*). Who's that? (*Crossing R.*) Oh, it's you, Lord Sloane. Yes, yes, come in by all means; very glad to see you again. It's some time since we met.

(*They shake hands.*)

SLOANE. They didn't want to let me come up. Told me you were busy, but I knew that if my wife was with you you couldn't be.

EDMONDSON (*awkwardly*). Eh—quite so! Quite so!

SLOANE. Hope I'm not intruding.

EDMONDSON (*crossing up to door back L.*). Not at all. There're several things I've got to see about in the theatre, so if you and St—Lady Sloane will excuse me, and will make yourselves at home here until I get back again, I shall be delighted.

SLOANE. Thanks very much. (*Puts his coat and hat on the piano.*)

EDMONDSON (*at door*). Just get those papers off my desk and bring them along with you, will you, Miss Gibson?

(*EDMONDSON exits.*)

MISS GIBSON (*rising*). Yes, sir.

(*She crosses L., round the lower end of the table. She gathers the papers from the table and exits door back, gazing all the time at STELLA and SLOANE in an ecstatic manner.*)

(*STELLA, her back turned to SLOANE, pretends to be absorbed in the study of a play-bill. He smiles a little wistfully before addressing her.*)

SLOANE (*at piano*). Stella!

(She makes no response. He moves nearer to her.)

SLOANE. Darling!

STELLA *(rises—over her shoulder)*. Did you speak?

SLOANE *(right up to her)*. Won't you say you're glad I've come for you?

STELLA. I—I—— *(She turns, and unable to resist the appeal in his face, flings herself into his arms.)* I think you're perfectly horrid.

SLOANE *(straining her close to him)*. Oh, my wife! Thank God, I've got you back!

STELLA. I'm still dreadfully—dreadfully angry with you.

SLOANE. No—no—you mustn't be angry any more.

STELLA. Yes, I shall—for ages and ages.

SLOANE *(coaxingly)*. But not with me?

STELLA *(pretending to push him away, but really drawing him closer)*. With all of you! I think that you're all horrid!

SLOANE. My dear! I can't tell you how sorry I am for all that's happened. I wanted to make my little wife so happy.

STELLA. And I wanted to make *you* happy. But it all went wrong. *(Crosses R.)* And it needn't have done, Toddles. We'd have been perfectly happy if only the others had left us alone.

SLOANE. It's my fault for ever having allowed them to interfere. *(Sits on table.)*

STELLA. No! No, it isn't! *(To him.)* It's my fault for having a devil inside me that pops out like a jack-in-the-box when people like Honoria touch the spring. All the same, I'm sorry I've made a mess of things with your mother. I *did* try, Toddles; I tried ever so hard to make her like me.

SLOANE *(putting his arm round her)*. D'you think I don't know that, little woman? By God! Nobody could have put up a pluckier fight than you did.

STELLA *(crosses R.C.)*. Fight! I should have called it a pitched battle!

SLOANE. Which you've won!

STELLA. Don't be silly, Toddles. You know I didn't win, I ran away.

SLOANE. No, no! You—er—executed a strategic retreat and left the enemy in confusion.

STELLA. In confusion?

SLOANE. And Carruthers turned it into a rout when he told us——

STELLA *(coming C.)*. He told you——? Oh! and he gave me his word!

SLOANE. He kept it, dear. He would only explain to us that you gave him the money to help a friend in trouble.

STELLA. And that satisfied you all? You don't want to know who it was?—not even you?

SLOANE. I, least of all.

STELLA. But it might have something to do with a man.

SLOANE. So it might.

STELLA. It *has* got something to do with a man.

SLOANE. Has it ?

STELLA. At least, he will be a man some day.

SLOANE. Splendid !

STELLA. He's a very nice man, too.

SLOANE. So much the better.

STELLA. Oh, aren't you even going to ask me what his name is ?

SLOANE. No.

STELLA. But it isn't fair.

SLOANE. What isn't ?

STELLA (*coming to him slightly*). To put such a horrible responsibility on me. If you're always going to trust me to be good, I shall have to be good—and think what a dull time that'll mean for me.

SLOANE (*smiling*). H'm. I'm not afraid, dear, that you will overdo it.

STELLA (*coming nearer*). You mean, that you won't always trust me to be good ?

SLOANE. I mean that I'll always trust you to be—yourself.

STELLA (*as she kisses him*). Bless him ! (*Goes R.*)

SLOANE (*rises, and follows her*). And now, old thing, we'd better be buzzing off. I've got the car outside, and, by Jove ! that reminds me, what pace did you travel to Town at ? I'll swear you didn't have ten minutes' start of me, and I did a steady thirty-five the whole way up.

STELLA (*R.*). I did a steady forty.

SLOANE. What !

STELLA. Archie said the car was "the quickest ever," and she is. I've proved it.

SLOANE. Well, I'm damned ! You reckless little——!

(STELLA *laughingly puts her finger to her lips.*)

Well, I'm hanged if I'm going to let you drive to-night. Now come on, let's go and get some dinner—(*Glances at his watch and corrects himself*)—supper—at the hotel, and we ought to be back at Dewhurst before midnight. (*Goes up slightly to the door.*)

STELLA. Oh, but I—I can't go back to Dewhurst to-night.

SLOANE (*disturbed*). Eh ?

STELLA. Toddles ! I've been and gone and done it !

SLOANE. Done what ?

STELLA (*comes to chair R. of table*). Tell me, darling, what were the happiest days that you and I have ever known. (*Sits.*)

SLOANE (*comes down between the chair and table, and takes her hand*). Why, our honeymoon, of course.

STELLA. No, no. I mean ordinary days. A honeymoon can't be counted in the run. It's a special performance.

SLOANE (*sits on the arm of the chair*). Well, if it hadn't been for all this trouble at Dewhurst——

STELLA. No "ifs." What *was* the happiest time we've ever known.

SLOANE. Well, I suppose, darling, when we were engaged.

STELLA. When I was playing here, and you used to come every night to see me, and take me out to supper afterwards, and then home in a taxi; and you used to be in ever such a funk every time we passed a lamp in case somebody you knew should see you kissing me! Don't you remember?

SLOANE. By Gad! Don't I?

STELLA. And our Sundays at Wargrave—me punting, and you lazing—and then both of us—er—lazing in the backwater.

SLOANE. Gad! They were great times.

STELLA. Weren't they just? No Honoria, no mother, no nothing!—only us. . . . Toddles, wouldn't you like those times all over again?

SLOANE. My dear!

STELLA. Well, I've fixed it all up. We're going to have those days over again. We'll take a jolly little flat somewhere in Knightsbridge and I'll come back to the theatre. (*Rises, and goes a little R.*)

SLOANE (*rising*). Stella!

STELLA. Yes! You haven't heard the wonderful news yet! I'm not coming back to the chorus, not even to a small part—Edmondson's going to star me! He's going to give me twenty pounds a week, and——

(*She sees SLOANE's look of dismay, and immediately her bubble is pricked.*)

Why d'you look like that. (*Pitifully.*) Oh, Toddles, don't say that I—I've made another bloomer.

(*A pause.*)

SLOANE (*with difficulty*). My dear, it only shows me how horribly I've failed. I thought—I hoped—that I should be able to make you so happy in your new life that you'd never regret having left the old. I've made a mess of it. . . . It's a bit of a knock, but if you feel that your happiness lies here, then——

STELLA. My happiness! It was the happiness of both of us I wanted. I thought that this was the way back to it—the only way.

SLOANE. My darling, can't you see what it'd mean? Can't you imagine what people'd say when they learnt that after four months of marriage you'd gone back to the stage?

STELLA. I see all that if I came back as Lady Sloane, but as Stella Deering——

SLOANE. What difference does it make? D'you think the papers wouldn't get hold of it? D'you think that Edmondson wouldn't see to it that they did?

STELLA. I never thought of that.

SLOANE. Darling, I don't want to sound brutal, but it's not you, as you, that he's counting on to draw all London to the Palladrome, but the scandal—the scandal!—that your coming back will cause.

(A pause. STELLA goes over to the piano and stands with bowed head, her back turned to him.)

Don't you see that, old thing?

STELLA. Yes, I—I do see it. If I hadn't been so vain—I should have seen it before.

SLOANE. My darling! *(Goes to her.)*

STELLA *(crossing towards the door)*. I'll just go and find him, and tell him it's all off.

SLOANE. Sweetheart, I—— *(He moves down by type-table R.)*

(A knock sounds at the door back, followed immediately by the entrance of SNELLING.)

SNELLING. Lord and Lady Knightsbridge are here, my lord, asking for you and Lady Sloane.

(STELLA backs down to LORD SLOANE.)

SNELLING. Mr. Edmondson thought you'd like to see them here.

(LORD and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE come into room.)

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE comes R.C. to STELLA. LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves round desk L. of it.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (C.) Sloane! Stella! What can we say? I don't suppose that either of you feel inclined to forgive us, but you must!—you must! We've come to beg forgiveness.

SLOANE (R.—*in sheer amazement*). Mother!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *(as amazed as he)*. D'you mean to say that Stella hasn't told you——?

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE at lower end of desk. LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE moves to L.C.)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. There! I win! I bet you she hadn't! Gad! She's a—a thoroughbred if ever there was one! *(Crosses to STELLA C.)*. Come here, you little——! *(His voice breaks.)* I can't thank you! God bless you! *(He takes both her hands in his and presses his lips to them, and then moves L.)*

SLOANE. Look here. I'm out of this. D'you mind explaining?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*with emotion*). It's Archie! He's owned up. That money that Stella paid to Mr. Carruthers was to settle his debts—to save our honour.

SLOANE (R.). Archie! And he promised me. . . . Oh, Stella, you brick!

STELLA (R.C., *awkwardly*). Oh, I say, do shut up about it. I only did what any other fellow would have done in my place.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*returning to STELLA with hands outstretched*). Stella, very, very humbly I ask your pardon. I—I've misjudged you sorely. I—I've misjudged other people sorely, too. (*She moves below chair R. of the table.*)

STELLA. You mean?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. My niece.

STELLA. Honoria!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Yes, but I'd rather not refer to that just now. (*Moves to STELLA.*) I've come to ask you—to beg you—to come back to us. We want you at Dewhurst. We need you if only for your sincerity.

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *blows his nose violently.*)

STELLA (*in broken voice*). Oh—you darling! Thank you! (*Is about to kiss LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE, and suddenly remembers.*) But—oh, good heavens! My contract with Edmondson. (*Crosses L.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Contract!

SLOANE. Father! Mother! Stella has almost settled to come back here——

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Here! D'you mean to the theatre?

SLOANE. She thought that if we went back to the place from which we started, that might help us—to—to regain our lost happiness.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Ah!

SLOANE (*continuing*). She didn't realize that if she signed the contract, she——

STELLA. But, Toddles, I *have* signed it!

SLOANE	} (<i>together</i>).	{	Darling!
LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE			Oh!
LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE			What!

(*Enter EDMONDSON, back L.*)

STELLA (*comes to top of table between table and fire-place*). Mr. Edmondson! Mr. Edmondson! I want you to let me off the contract.

EDMONDSON (*above table*). Eh? . . . Oh! (*He pauses, and looks with narrowed eyes at SLOANE and his parents.*) Yes, I was a bit afraid this might happen. (*He comes down to the top of the table.*)

STELLA (*pleadingly*). You will, won't you?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. He must! (*Slightly forward c.*)

(EDMONDSON raises his eyebrows, and turns to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE quizzically.)

EDMONDSON. Must! (*Comes to chair.*) With due deference to Your Ladyship, I beg to disagree. . . . Lord Sloane, may I have the honour of being introduced to Lord and Lady Knightsbridge?

SLOANE. Oh!—er—sorry. Mother, father, let me introduce you to Mr. Edmondson, the manager of the theatre.

(*They bow, LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE particularly stiffly.*)

EDMONDSON. And now, shall we sit down and go into this matter.

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE places a chair for LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE R. of table. She sits. SLOANE offers the typist's chair to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE, who declines, and moves over to him, R.C. EDMONDSON prepares to seat himself at his desk, whilst STELLA leans on a chair above the table.)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. There's nothing to be gone into, except, possibly, the question of compensation.

EDMONDSON. Indeed?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. And that's a matter that can be settled between you and Lord Sloane at some future time.

EDMONDSON. I see! (*Sits.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Lady Sloane recognizes fully that there can be no question of her returning to the stage, and, therefore, the contract that she was—er—induced to sign in a moment of—er—er—misdirected enthusiasm, must be cancelled.

STELLA. I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Edmondson; I hadn't understood what it'd mean. But I see it now, and I'll be ever so grateful to you if you'll let me off. (*She sits.*)

EDMONDSON. Ah! You will observe, Lady Knightsbridge, that Lady Sloane doesn't tell me that I must! (*He turns to STELLA.*) I'm glad, my dear, that you have the courtesy to recognize that it's a case of—"Please!"

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming towards table*). Believe me, Mr. Edmondson, I recognize that it will be an act of generosity on your part to release my daughter-in-law from her obligations—an act for which we shall be deeply grateful.

EDMONDSON (*rises and leans on table*). I appreciate that, Lord Knightsbridge, and I assure you that, if it had been possible—

STELLA. If! (*Rises.*)

EDMONDSON. I would have done as you ask without a moment's hesitation, but the circumstances are peculiar, and compel me to hold Lady Sloane to her contract—at any rate, for a short time.

SLOANE. But, I say, dash it all, Edmondson—

EDMONDSON. Has Lady Sloane explained the circumstances to you ?

STELLA. No—you see—— !

EDMONDSON. Then, little lady, may I be allowed to do so ? . . .

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*incredulously*). 'Umph !

EDMONDSON. When Lady Sloane came to see me this evening, I was in a quandary. The star upon whom I had relied to be the great attraction for our new edition had—er—well—will be unable to appear. I was at my wits' ends to know what to do, when Lady Sloane dropped from the heavens and asked me to engage her.

STELLA. But I'm not a star !

EDMONDSON (*coming down and pointing to the bill below the fireplace*). The appearance of Viscountess Sloane in "All the Heavenly Bodies" will put all the stars in London in eclipse.

SLOANE. But I understood from my wife that she was to be engaged under her maiden name of Stella Deering.

STELLA. Yes, yes !

EDMONDSON (*crossing R.*). Oh, pardon me ! I've got a copy of the contract in my pocket. (*He produces it, and hands it to SLOANE.*) If you will look at Clause 3, you will see that I undertake and Lady Sloane agrees to permit me to star her under the name of Viscountess Sloane.

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *goes over to SLOANE and looks at the contract.*)

STELLA. I never agreed to that !

EDMONDSON (*C., with his back to the audience*). I gave you the contract to read before you signed it. If you didn't read it, that's not my fault. (*Crosses L. below table.*)

SLOANE. But—dash it all ! You might have pointed it out to her.

STELLA. Yes. Why didn't you ? You pointed out to me several other things that were far less important.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*rises*). This is very evidently a case of trickery.

EDMONDSON (*angrily*). Lady Knightsbridge ! I really must object to such remarks.

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *moves up C.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*having taken the contract from SLOANE—"sotto voce"*). My dear ! Be quiet ! Be quiet !

STELLA (*crossing C. to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE*). Look here, papa, you can see for yourself ; if I'd agreed to appear as Lady Sloane, should I have signed the contract "Stella Deering ?" (*She points to the signature.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Why ? What's that, my dear ? (*He examines the contract.*) Oh ! Ho ! This seems to put a different complexion on the matter. (*Crosses L.C. to table.*)

(*Exclamations of excitement from all but EDMONDSON. LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE turns round.*)

EDMONDSON. How so ?

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*at the table, putting contract on it*). I believe that a contract signed by a married woman in her maiden name is invalid.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Then that settles things. (*Coming down R.*)

EDMONDSON. I'm sorry to disappoint you, Lady Knightsbridge, but it doesn't. Lady Sloane could have signed as Susan Jones, and the contract would still have bound her. All that is required is the ability to prove that she did sign it.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Are you sure of that ?

EDMONDSON. Quite. But don't take my word for it. Find out from your lawyer in the morning. (*Sits on his chair at the desk.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Lord Knightsbridge would certainly have done that in any case. (*Turns up.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. No, no ! We can settle the matter in some other way ? Mr. Edmondson, any sum in reason that you care to name—— (*He takes out his cheque-book and sits, putting it on the table.*)

SLOANE (*crosses L.C.*). Please, father, this is my affair. (*Takes out his cheque-book.*)

EDMONDSON (*rising—obstinately*). Gentlemen, it's not a question of money, but of my reputation as a manager. I've announced that I'm going to open next week with the biggest attraction that's been in London for a century !—and, by Heaven, I'm going to. (*He bangs the table with his fist.*)

(*STELLA moves R.*)

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*crossing to top of desk and assuming her most majestic attitude*). But not with Lady Sloane in your programme.

EDMONDSON. Pardon me !

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*with great emphasis*). Pardon me. Lady Sloane is returning to the country in the morning.

EDMONDSON. You mean—— ?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. That you can lead a horse to the water, Mr.—er——

EDMONDSON. Edmondson.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Edmondson—thank you—but you cannot make her drink. Whatever you may have—er—induced Lady Sloane to sign, you can't *compel* her to appear in your heavenly bodies.

EDMONDSON. Oh ! So that's the idea, is it ?

SLOANE. By Jove ! yes, mother ! You're right. . . . Look here,

Edmondson, you're trying to take unfair advantage of a girl's unthinking impulse. You're trying to create a scandal, and to trade on it. Well, you're not going to. Contract or no contract, my wife will not appear in your revue.

EDMONDSON. Am I to take that verdict as final, Lady Sloane?

STELLA (*comes c.*). I *did* ask you to let me off. I asked you nicely. If you refuse—well, I've sworn to obey my husband. (*She goes to SLOANE and takes his arm.*)

EDMONDSON. Very well, then, I shall be compelled to sue you for damages.

SLOANE. Sue, and be damned. (*Crosses R.*)

STELLA. Oh!

EDMONDSON (*with studied calmness*). I should be very regretful to do it. I should hate the public to know that, after four months of married life, Lady Sloane ran away from her husband, and implored me to give her an engagement in the chorus, so that she might escape from her mother-in-law's abominable treatment.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*horrified*). Really! (*She moves up c.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. What!

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *rises, and goes up to his wife and attempts to pacify her.*)

STELLA (*c.*). I never said she'd treated me abominably!

EDMONDSON (*continuing relentlessly*). I should hate to focus public attention upon the somewhat interesting career of—(*He refers to the "Daily Mirror"*)—Lady Honoria Nesbitt.

STELLA. I never mentioned Honoria.

EDMONDSON (*hotly*). Well, whoever the feline cousin was to whom you referred so movingly.

SLOANE (*coming forward to the table, and assuming a threatening attitude*). Look here, Edmondson! You shut up about my people, or, by God——! (*Thumps table.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*comes down R. of SLOANE*). Tch, tch, tch, tch, Sloane! It's no good pretending that we should like these matters brought into court—we shouldn't. Mr. Edmondson would seem to have us at his mercy. I don't know what we're going to do. (*He turns to STELLA—brokenly*). Child! Child! (*Turns up c.*)

STELLA (*excitedly*). Child! By Gad, papa, you've hit it, I am a child! (*Goes R.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Eh?

SLOANE. What do you mean? (*Crosses R. to her.*)

STELLA. I'm an infant—or whatever you call it—I've not—er—attained my majority—or whatever the word is.

EDMONDSON (*disturbed*). You mean, you're not twenty-one?

STELLA. No! I'm twenty years, eight months, and—er—(*She counts on her fingers*)—nine days. (*Comes across to SLOANE.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*coming down c.*). Then—by Jove!—you—can't enter into a legal agreement without the sanction of your guardian.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. And her guardian is? (*Goes to LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Her husband.

SLOANE (R.). Who declines to give his sanction.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*goes to bottom of table*). And now, what have you got to say, Mr.—er——

STELLA

SLOANE

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE

} (*together, in a stage whisper*). Edmondson!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Well!

EDMONDSON (*below table with dignity*). Nothing—except to remind you of the motto of your caste—"Noblesse Oblige." (*He turns to the fire-place.*)

(LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE *flinches*. STELLA *looks from one to another.*)

STELLA. Oh! He's right. It does oblige. . . . Toddles, you've got to give your sanction to that contract.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE. Stella!

STELLA. Oh—don't you see? He must! I'm not out of the top drawer like you. There's precious little French I understand, but "Noblesse Oblige"—I do know what that means. It stands for everything that has made you, Toddles—Sloane on the Square—always on the Square. Once you'd signed your name to anything, you'd honour it, no matter what it cost you. I must do the same. If Mr. Edmondson won't let me off my contract I must stick to it. Even if people *do* say rotten things about us, it'll be better than having to think them about ourselves.

SLOANE (*takes her hand—deeply moved*). You're right, old woman—dead right. I withdraw my objections, Mr. Edmondson.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*moving up*). Oh!

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*as she passes*). My dear, there's nothing further to be said. (*Goes up with LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

EDMONDSON (*coming below table*). Pardon me, Lord Knightsbridge, there is. Like Lady Sloane, I'm not out of the top drawer, but I have my code. (*He takes up the contract and tears it across.*) The contract is cancelled. (*He throws the pieces on the floor.*)

STELLA (*coming forward to him*). Thank you.

(*Chorus of exclamations of relief and gratitude. EDMONDSON holds up a hand to stay them.*)

EDMONDSON. Please don't thank me. I'm by no means proud of myself. And now, if you'll permit me to say good night—(*He moves between table and fire-place.*)

(SNELLING bursts into the room in violent excitement.)

SNELLING. Miss de Vaux on the line, sir. (*He points to the telephone.*)

EDMONDSON. Eh? (*He goes round the top of the table and picks up the telephone.*)

SNELLING. Trunk call from Killarney. She seems to have changed her mind, sir—wants to come back.

STELLA. Oh!

(EDMONDSON snatches off the receiver and puts it to his ear. All stand staring in various attitudes.)

EDMONDSON (*speaking into the telephone*). Hallo! Yes, my beauty! . . . Edmondson speaking. Oh, so you've found him out already, have you? Wish now you'd listened to what I told you, eh? Well, you've made a bonny mess of things. . . . What's that? Oh! It's all very well being sorry now. You don't imagine I'm going to take you back, do you? What? . . . Why, of course I have. I'm in negotiation with one of the biggest stars in Europe— (*He throws an amused glance at STELLA.*)

STELLA. Me! (*Attempting to take c., she is restrained by SLOANE, and silenced by LORD and LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE.*)

EDMONDSON (*still speaking into the telephone*). Bigger than you?—rather. Oh no, I'm not going to tell you who she is, but I can promise you you'd jump if I did.

STELLA. She's not the only one who'd jump! (*The former business is here repeated.*)

EDMONDSON. No. I haven't fixed definitely,

(LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE makes a movement, and EDMONDSON winks at him.)

but—if you catch the night boat, and are here for rehearsal at eleven o'clock to-morrow, we'll—we'll talk about it. . . . Right! Good night! (*He replaces receiver and turns to the others, coming down R. of table.*) Phew! How's that for virtue rewarded? (*Goes to c.*)

STELLA (*crossing to him c., shaking him warmly by the hand*). Oh! I can't tell you how glad I am!

EDMONDSON. Thank you, little lady.

(STELLA crosses L.)

SLOANE (R.). Nor I. (*Shakes hands.*)

EDMONDSON. Thank you.

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*up R.C.*). Nor I. (*Shakes hands.*)

EDMONDSON. Thank you, sir.

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (U.C.). Perhaps I, too, may be permitted

to add my congratulations, Mr.—(*Slight hesitation*)—Edmondson. Got it! (*She holds out her hand.*)

(EDMONDSON *shakes it cordially.*)

EDMONDSON. Thank you, Lady Knightsbridge. And now I must ask you to be good enough to excuse me. (*Crosses up to the door.*) I must catch my stage director. (*Turns at the door.*) By the way, if you'd care to see the new edition, I shall be very happy to place a box at your disposal.

(*Goes out amidst a chorus of thanks.*)

LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*crosses to STELLA*). Splendid fellow. "All's well that ends well!" (*He shakes STELLA's hand and moves up.*)

STELLA. Yes, but is it ending well? (*Crossing to LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE wistfully*). You're sure you really, really want "Brown Sugar" back at Dewhurst?

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (c.). My dear, it's impossible to tell you how much we want you.

STELLA. You darling! I *will* try and be different. I *will* try not to be vulgar and not to use words that you don't like. I'll try—devilish hard—oh! (*She puts her hand over her mouth.*)

SLOANE. Dearest!

LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE (*smiling*). And I'll try to be different, too, child. I'll try—devilish hard!

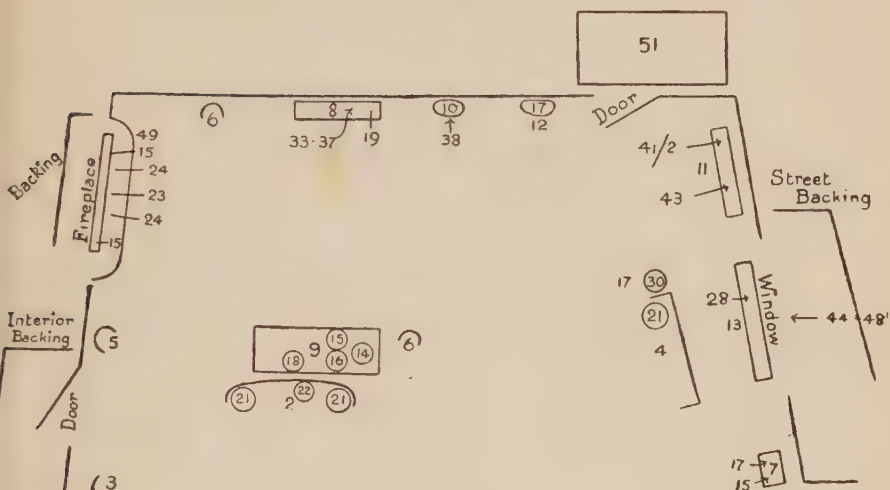
(STELLA *crosses to SLOANE R.C., and they embrace*. LORD KNIGHTSBRIDGE *places a chair R. of the table for LADY KNIGHTSBRIDGE*. *She sits, and they congratulate each other.*)

CURTAIN.

BROWN SUGAR

Scene Plot, Act I Hotel Sitting Room, Oak Chamber

Light Corridor Backing

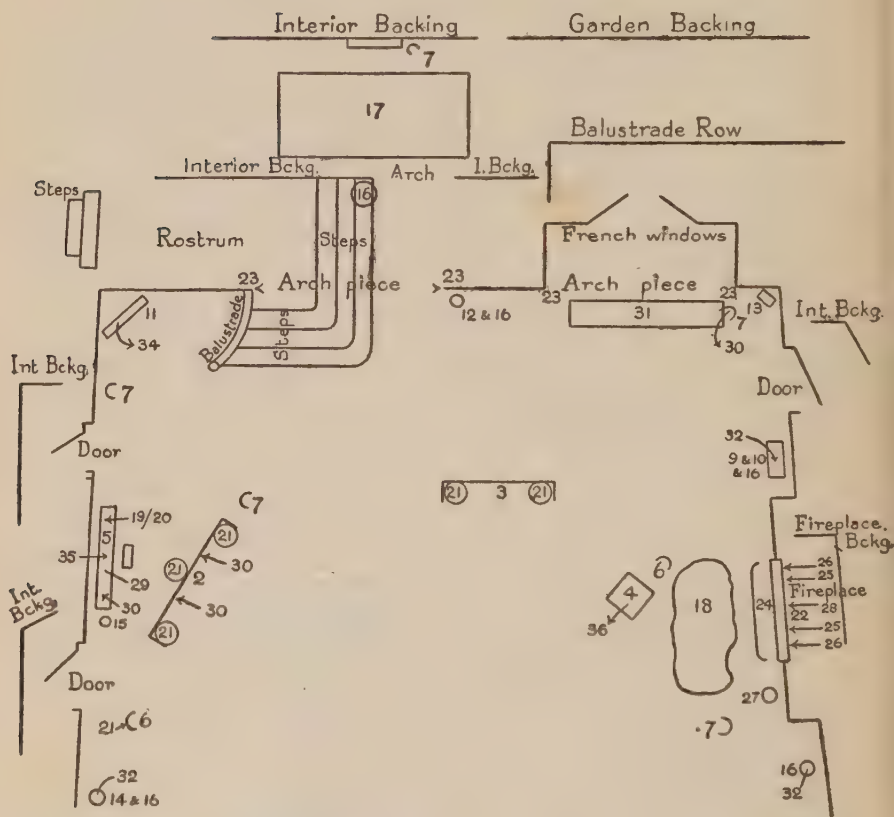


Property Plot, Act I

1. Tapestry carpet.
2. 1 large gilt cane settee.
3. 1 gilt cane arm-chair.
4. 1 gilt and tapestry-covered settee.
5. 1 " " " arm-chair.
6. 2 gilt and tapestry-covered chairs.
7. 1 revolving bookcase.
8. 1 writing bureau.
9. 1 large gilt table.
10. 1 kidney table.
11. 1 glass book cabinet.
12. 1 cabinet.
13. 1 gilt flower-box.
14. Silver cigarette box.
15. 4 silver photo frames.
16. 1 silver match-stand.
17. 3 black flower vases.
18. 1 " vase.
19. Silver inkstand (on No. 8).
20. Silver ornament (on No. 8).
21. 3 cushions.
22. 1 mascot on settee (2).
23. French clock on mantel.
24. 2 Green vases.
25. 2 white vases (on No. 8).
26. 31 roses and foliage (in bowls).
27. 1 flower-stand (steps) in fireplace.
28. 12 ferns in fireplace and window jardinière.
29. 3 azaleas in fireplace and window jardinière.
30. 1 gilt round table.
31. Magazines—*Field*, *Life*, *Vogue*—telegram forms on bureau.
32. Tapestry in frame (on scene) above fireplace.
33. Writing pad
34. Notepaper
35. Envelopes
36. Pencils
37. Pens
38. Large tantalus and cig., etc., boxes on No. 10.
39. 3 bottles in tantalus.
40. Books in bookcases.
41. Telephone on bookcase (11).
42. Telephone book and A.B.C. on bookcase (11).
43. 1 16-inch green-painted china vase on bookcase.
44. Amber curtains
45. " pelmet and tassels
46. Curtain rod
47. 2 lace curtains
48. 2 small brass rods
49. Curb.
50. Mantel.
51. Persian rug in corridor.
52. Ash-tray on table (9).
53. Parcels (off) (Stella).

BROWN SUGAR

Scene Plot. Act II Sitting Hall at Dewhurst.



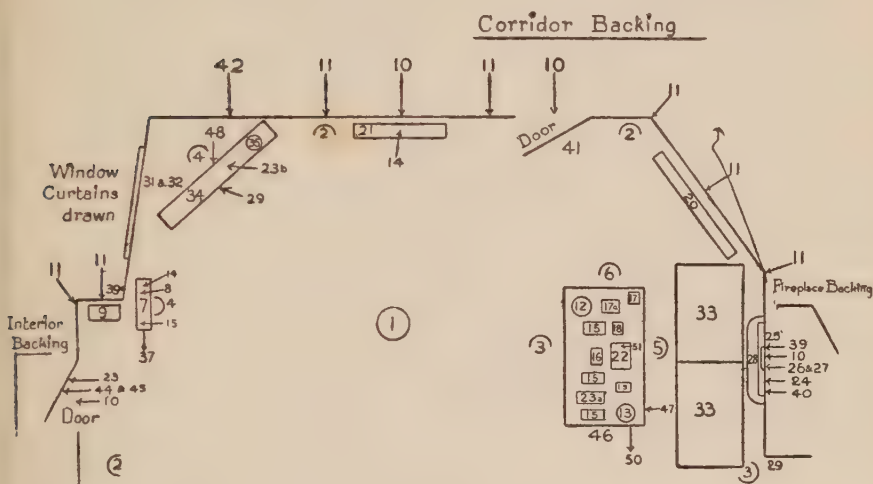
Property Plot, Act II

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Blue carpet on parq; stage cloth. | 13. Grandfather's clock. | 26. Ornaments—2 blue vases. |
| 2. Large cane settee (and cushion). | 14. 1 small pedestal. | 27. Figure on pedestal. |
| 3. 1 small settee. | 15. Paper basket. | 28. Chinese figure. |
| 4. 1 square table (tea). | 16. 5 large vases. | 29. " stone figure. |
| 5. Writing table. | 17. 1 Persian rug. | 30. 4 magazines— <i>Sport and Dramatic, Country Life, Gentlewoman, Sphere.</i> |
| 6. 2 cane arm-chairs. | 18. 1 white bear rug. | 31. 1 black rug. |
| 7. 5 chairs. | 19. Silver inkstand (2 pots). | 32. Foliage and Chrysanthemums in vases. |
| 8. Piano stool. | 20. Writing pad and envelopes. | 33. 1 large tapestry frame. |
| 9. 1 small cabinet. | 21. 6 cushions. | 34. Cigar-box. |
| 10. 1 " table. | 22. Fire-screens. | 35. Chinese work-box. |
| 11. 1 cabinet. | 23. 4 curtains and 2 tie-ups (black and silver). | 36. Tablecloth on tea-table. |
| 12. 1 large pedestal. | 24. Brass fender and irons. | |
| | 25. Ornaments—2 black boys. | |

BROWN SUGAR

Act III

Manager's Office at the Palladrome Theatre



Property Plot, Act III

1. Tapestry carpet.
2. 3 gilt chairs.
3. 2 gilt arm-chairs.
4. 2 bentwood chairs.
5. 1 revolving office chair.
6. 1 office chair.
7. Typewriting-table.
8. Typewriter.
9. File cabinet.
10. 4 large photo frames (on scene.)
11. 6 small " " " "
12. 1 table telephone.
13. 1 pedestal telephone.
14. 2 writing-paper stands.
15. 4 letter baskets (with papers).
16. Wooden inkstand, 2 pots.
17. A.B.C. and telephone directory. (17a)
18. Ash-tray.
19. Memo. block.
20. Large book cabinet.
21. Book-case.
22. Blotter, writing-paper, envelopes.
23. Papers—*Mirror* (23), *Stage* (23a), *Telegraph* (23b).
24. Cigars, box, match-stand.
25. Fireplace.
26. Overmantel (gilt).
27. Clock.
28. Fender and irons (Act II).
29. 2 "Palladrome" bills.
30. Photo postcards (on overmantel).
31. Curtain rod.
32. Tapestry curtains.
33. 2 black rugs, Dummy books.
34. Piano.
35. Manuscript.
36. Photo-frame.
37. Box file.
38. Waste-paper basket (under table).
39. 2 calendars.
40. Matches.
41. Theatre Guide.
42. Chromatic " "
43. 2 contracts.
44. Mackintosh } on peg.
45. Hat }
46. Large writing-table.
47. Song.
48. Music.
49. 2 cheque-books.
50. Bell-push on desk.
51. Letters.
52. Photos on mantel.

Properties off Stage

Sportsman (Saunders).
 Notebook (Carruthers).
 IOU's
 Cheque-book in Stella's bag.
 Cheque (Honorina).
 Standard (Honorina).
 Telegram (reply paid).
 Cigarettes (Lord Sloane).
 Cakes on Cake-stand.
 Tea.
 3 letters (Archie, Stella, and Sloane).
 Sugar.

Milk.
 Hot water.
 Coin (Carruthers).
 Silver Tea Tray with :—
 Silver teapot.
 „ water-jug.
 „ sugar-basin and tongs.
 „ milk jug.
 8 cups and saucers.
 8 spoons.
 Plate.
 Salver (Saunders).

Lighting Plots

Act I

No. 1 and 2 Battens.—White and amber, full.
 Floats.—1 white, 2 amber circuits.
 Perches.—Amber, 4 lamps, full up.
 Small white length.—Door back.
 Small „ „.—C.P. and D.S. door.
 Two 3-light brackets on back wall (unlit).
 2½ watts on window P.S.

Act II

No. 1.—¾ amber white, full.
 No. 2.—1 amber, 2 white circuits, full.
 Floats.—2 amber, 2 white circuits, full.
 No. 4 Batten.—2 amber, 1 white circuits, full.
 Three ¼ watts on back cloth, amber.
 1 length amber and white on back cloth C.P.
 1 „ „ „ on stairs C.P.
 1 small white length D.S.
 1 small W.S. on doors C.P.
 1 small white length P.S. door.
 Three 1-light and one 2-light flambeau on scene (unlit).

Act III

No. 1 and 2 Battens.—Amber, full.
 Floats.—2 amber, 2 white circuits, full.
 1 small white length on door at back.
 1 „ „ „ O.P.
 Lighted { 2 brackets on back.
 1 table standard on desk O.P.
 1 „ „ mantelshelf P.S.
 2-light radiator for fire P.S.
 1 baby spot for fire P.S.





